



Barbara Michalak - Pikulska

# Transcending Traditions Thurayya al-Baqsemi

A Creative Compilation - Poetry, Prose and Paint

Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego

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# Contents

Introduction	7
Life Story	9
The Collection of Short Stories <i>Al-‘araq al-aswad</i> (The Black Sweat)	19
The Collection of Short Stories <i>As-sidra</i> (The Lotus Tree)	27
The Collection of Short Stories <i>Shumu’ as-saradib</i> (Cellar Candles)	35
The Collection of Short Stories <i>Rahil an-nawafiz</i> (The Windows’ Flight)	45
<i>Muzakkirat Fattuma al-kuwaytiyya as-saghira</i> (Recollections of a Small Kuwaiti Fattuma)	57
Literary Characters in Thurayya Al-Baqsamī’s Short Stories	63
The Style of Thurayya Al-Baqsamī’s Short Stories	71
The Image of War in the Eyes of Thurayya Al-Baqsamī	75
Symbol and Painting in Thurayya Al-Baqsamī’s Creative Output	81
Tradition, Modernity and Innovation in the Creativity of Thurayya Al-Baqsamī	91
<i>Fi kaffi ‘usfura zarqa’</i> (The Blue Sparrow on My Palm) – Thurayya Al-Baqsamī’s Poetical World	97
Conclusion	113
Appendix	
1. Simplified transliteration of Arabic names and titles, used in the book, and its equivalent in the English Transliteration System	115



# Introduction

When on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1994 I flew to Kuwait in order to become acquainted with Thurayya Al-Baqsami I did not expect to meet a woman relatively young, full of vigour who had such a huge artistic and literary output behind her. I was to shortly become convinced of her remarkable character, sincerity, and exceptional sense of humour. Her smiling eyes, way of behaviour, spontaneous, interesting and colourful utterances meant that I was always hungry for more after every moment spent with her. When I got to know Thurayya and her marvellous family my stay in Kuwait became exceptionally interesting for I could meet the interesting people who surrounded Thurayya and her husband Muhammad Al-Qadiri – a former Kuwaiti diplomat. It is important to here note that Thurayya enjoys enormous popularity and occupies an important place in artistic, literary and diplomatic circles.

Thurayya Al-Baqsami appears to rise above the prose of life and does not set foot upon the deserted earth burnt by the sun and the rich streets vibrating with ostentation in this oil state. Thurayya releases an unmet directness and sense of solidarity with everyone whose fate has been dominated by injustice and suffering. It has not stopped her curiosity about life and people, as equally it has not been a barrier to her fantasy – lively, full of colours and courage – inseparable features of her artistic and literary work. She is an exceptionally sensitive compassionate and rebellious witness of the reality around. To see and not to be moved by what you see, to freely exist amidst the impossible and limitations of existence, to follow fleeting beauty and not to allow it to be extinguished in the mind, to be oneself and create – these are the determinants of her life credo, after all universal everywhere on earth.

Thurayya Al-Baqsami's artistic creativity and writing is creative and sharp, while at the same time being the conveyor of artistic truth, the mirror into which contemporariness should glance; being not divided into the borders of culture, sex and parts of the world.

There have appeared many articles within Kuwait and the Gulf on the subject of the life and creativity of Thurayya al-Baqsami. In 1997 there appeared the first monograph in Arabic written by myself and entitled

*Thurayya Al-Baqsamī – Between a Brush and a Pen.* It was an attempt to systemise her literary creativity as well as examining the significance of her artistic work. It was chiefly meant to draw attention to Thurayya Al-Baqsamī's literary activity as she was in 1993 honoured, as the first woman, with the prize of the Kuwaiti Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences in recognition of her book entitled *Cellar Candles*, while in 1997 she was awarded the State Award for Children's Literature for the book *The Recollection of a Small Kuwaiti Fattuma*.

The present work in English has been corrected, brought up to date and supplemented.

Cracow, 2009



It happens sometimes to writers that they draw or paint on the margins of their work, the opposite is also known, the literary attempts of the painter. It is rare, however, when both of these fields are treated professionally by the self same person. It is just such dualism that we find in Thurayya Al-Baqsami. Enough to state that the very same hand that wrote *Cellar Candles* – for which she was awarded a prize by the Kuwaiti Foundation for Scientific Development – illustrated the said volume. The illustrations are in her intention a supplement to the text, creativity equal and accompanying the written word. At times one may be under the impression that Thurayya competes between drawing and the word.

The pictorial nature of the prose and the factual graphicness that accompanies the drawings results in the fact that these two elements change as if their functions: the text becomes an illumination of the illustration, while it too becomes the premonition of the image painted with a word.

Thurayya Al-Baqsami has overcome with her work many barriers not only those connected with being a woman-artist, but also those linked to the tradition of visual art within the Arab world. There are numerous throwbacks to elements from the past; she reaches for ancient cultures, as well as making use of the living cultural customs of the present. On the example of the phenomenon of her creative personality one may conjecture as to the role her creativity fulfils in relation to the actual Arab world outlook, and a wider consciousness on the scale of civilisation per se. Indisputably apt will be the assertion that Thurayya Al-Baqsami is a loyal witness of her time. This finds credence equally in the scenes presented from everyday life, like for instance the descriptions of children or in the stories' illustrations, especially those devoted to creating war scenes.

Yet there is also another Thurayya. Far away from the realistic presentation of the world. It is a form of personality consciously open to cultural differentiation. She comprehends this and synthetically manifests it through her art. She sees in it the route to achieve knowledge befitting reality. Befitting for it is not limited to patterns, or suffering from the bottomless layers of the interior and perhaps the invisible side of the life of the world.

The symbol, symbolism, preciseness and ambiguity are intertwined in her drawings, images and pictures. She equally makes use of the energy of the sign itself in a way similar to primordial artists – the authors of etchings and rock paintings where the important elements touched on are as if the inspiration of the artist in the ecstasy and joy of creation. Many of her pictures show traces of the spontaneity of work; especially those containing magical and abstract elements. Thurayya appears to not only draw images of intuition, to recreate them from internal design, but appears to communicate through them with some ideal civilisation full of signs understood by all alive, and may be by those who have departed yet are developed in art. There is no absence of animals – usually already endowed with a double or treble sphere of symbolic effect and semantic expression. They appear there as symbols within the field of a given idea e.g. the dove – the symbol of peace, as signs of tension and the gravitation of a living element, as elements of cultural unity e.g. bird-like winged figures, as well as primitive signs with a magical origin.

Thurayya makes use of a lot from imitation – understood obviously as creative recalling – and stylisation, many drawn from the field of ancient cultures. What is the reason for this stylisation within a person so aptly expressing herself in the written word? The reason is so complex, and yet at the same time as obvious and clear as she is herself. If someone was born in such a geographical latitude then expression through image is a not something easy, not arousing doubt, though it could be even dangerous. If one was to search for the reason why abstract decoration dominates or dominated in Arabic art – the reason would be as deep and darkly shrouded as the history of the people themselves. It was certainly connected with the conscious use of the image, concentrating on the visual optic which always presented humanity with many problems; for it recalled the material nature of the world and was prepared to seize every thought in its material shackles which, however, in the formulated path of absolute thought tried to be avoided. Besides, the image could transfer bad energy or even the content of man's experience. It seems that the image could have stopped this crystallisation, the highest internal vigilance of the Arab soul, sensitivity to the lightest movement of time, as well as continuity in the ethos of the wanderer. For the said sensitivity, for moving along a unique path in time, is a completely internal quality and only the fluid of poetry is able to keep pace with it. It seems, though, that the main reason was the lack of tradition or practice in thinking in terms of a constructed image, for which the present considers an imperative ability.

Thurayya Al-Baqsamī fights for her distinctiveness, she does not fit into the ideological and social categories of either Kuwait or the countries of the Gulf. Thurayya writes in images. She paints as an artist. She does not paint objects, she paints concepts. She feels the constant need to reveal herself. Thurayya lived through the period of change connected with the discovery of oil, and with this went the destruction of the old houses and the construction in their place of new. Hence the monotonous and mournful landscape of Kuwait struck her. Thurayya's eyes quivered from what she looked at, while she herself doubted if she was actually seeing what she observed.

The events of the war bewildered and awoke Thurayya. It seemed to her that she had lost her homeland. But this was not to be the case. As long as families like hers lived in Kuwait, Kuwait would exist. The war forced everyone to notice the changes that had taken place around, to convince themselves that almost every value had changed into another value. Thurayya, under the influence of events, started to speak in a different language. There came about in her creative work a period of green faces – a period of sad and painful writing and painting. Thurayya always felt the overwhelming need to look at the world in her own way. Reality is not for her the same as it is for others. Gertrude Stein in the biography entitled *Picasso* writes: *War forces people to recognise the creator who first noticed changes and gave them expression in his creativity.*<sup>1</sup>

In Thurayya's artistic interior there are many ideas and the whole of her life is the expulsion of those ideas from herself. Her work harmoniously intertwines with a happy family life, travel, days filled with work and engagements. She is gentle in character, appreciates the taste, beauty of life and the world. She likes beautiful objects, as equally beautiful thoughts. She is a genuine artist, and an artist is someone who understands, or is even ahead of, his time before contemporaries are able to notice it.

Thurayya al-Baqsamī was born on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1952 in Kuwait, in the Sharq district, in the American Mission Hospital, when her mother was a mere sixteen years old. Thurayya's mother had been married already for four years, and the twins Thurayya and Farida were her third and fourth children. The older brothers Salman and 'Adnan, as well as the younger sisters Nahida and Nadya completed the family. Her grandfather was a well-known Kuwaiti builder Ahmad 'Abd Al-Halem Al-Bana, of

<sup>1</sup> Gertruda Stein, *Picasso*, Warszawa 1982, p. 54.

whom Thurayya is extremely proud. She often talks of his talents which were to be unsurpassed by European architects. There are to this day houses designed by him in Kuwait. Her father was a merchant and manufacturer of sweets called “buqsum,” hence the family name. He was a tolerant man who respected other cultures, as a consequence Thurayya, and her brothers and sisters, was sent at the age of four to the Lebanon for schooling at a Catholic school run by nuns.

She lived together with her brothers and sisters in a dormitory from 1956 until 1958, i.e. until the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon. The very separation from her own country and finding herself in completely different cultural conditions must have been a powerful episode and experience yet constituted the first step towards the breaking of the barriers to know the world, to understand it, to become acquainted with other traditions and foreign languages. Thurayya herself emphasises how important that very period was to be on later years of her life. Her mother, despite the fact that she had got married so young had gone to school, knew how to read and write in both Arabic and Persian. And it was to be her knowledge and love of languages that were the greatest solace, encouragement and help for young Thurayya.

In listening to her mother's stories Thurayya started to record in the form of short stories the history of old Kuwait with the atmosphere of its bazaars, the smell of the jasmine and the loud talk of the bargaining Arabs. She was to publish them when a mere seventeen years old. It was her mother who corrected the grammar and style of her pieces. She encouraged her to work creatively, and her involvement in her daughter's work was so great that she even copied out in her beautiful hand all of the works before they were sent off to be published. Thanks to her Thurayya perceived the joy of writing and the freedom which results from it.

The Polish poet and Nobel Prize winner Wisława Szymborska captures this in a simple poem:

The twinkling of an eye can last as long as you want  
It allows itself to be cut into small eternities  
Full of globes arrested in flight  
For ever, if I order, nothing will happen here  
Without my will even the leaves won't fall  
Nor will the stalks be crushed under the drop of the hoof.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Wisława Szymborska, *Radość pisania*, in: *Poezje*, Kraków 1989, p. 52.

Her stay in a foreign school brought joy to this sensitive girl through the contact it gave with nature, something undoubtedly influential in the development of her artistic talents and literary imagination. It was for that also a period of ordeal. Firstly it was difficult to be parted from one's parents, something intensified by the strict regime run by the nuns in the dormitory, who constantly reprimanded the children even resorting to corporal punishment. This said Thurayya values her stay in the Lebanese school and has said the following about it: *That school taught me a lot. I learnt foreign languages, music and drawing.*<sup>3</sup>

Besides an advantage of the school was its co-educational nature. Lebanon was not, however, a peaceful place at the time, but a place of conflicts which finally led to the outbreak of civil war. What with the bombings the necessity to leave the country became obvious. Given her tender age this was an unexpected and dramatic experience of the immensity of danger, especially during the evacuation organised by the Red Cross, where the patrol that stopped them pointed guns at their backs. One can envisage the fear and terror of the children who have come into contact with violence for the first time far from their loved ones. This stay was to be at the same time a dynamic impulse to the future development of Thurayya's personality. She speaks of it herself; that then as quite a small child she discovered a love for art. This ability she was to display upon her return to Kuwait. Circumstances difficult to comprehend meant that the years Thurayya spent in Lebanon were not recognised and Thurayya had to pass the relevant classes all over again. The result of which was that this older and already experienced girl became bored during lessons. As she recalls: *I was too big and too clever for the first form. I only had problems with Arabic.*<sup>4</sup>

At this time Thurayya's artistic talents clearly started to express themselves. She recalls the joy that the drawing of bricklayers brought her, whom she observed at work while visiting her grandfather, the architect. This drawing instantly gained recognition in her teacher's eyes, who showed it to all around which only increased the talented child's satisfaction. This was in total contrast to school in Lebanon which shamed the children with subtle punishments forcing them, for example, to walk with

<sup>3</sup> On the basis of an interview conducted by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Thurayya Al-Baqsamī on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 1995 in Kuwait.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

a note on their back which read: *This girl is a right donkey at maths.*<sup>5</sup> Thurayya – who was quite unsociable at the time – painted for many, and sometimes for whole afternoons. She equally wrote poetry and it even happened that she painted pictures to illustrate them, which spoke for her future creative activity – the illustration of her own texts with her own drawings.

Her problems with Arabic finished when she moved to the Qurtuba School in Shamiyya. There a good woman teacher from Syria encouraged her to read more in Arabic. Thurayya underwent a period of intensified interest in the classics. She was fascinated by the work of the Egyptian writer Mustafa Lutfi Al-Manfaluti who represented a new style in Arabic prose and after that came a fascination with the works of Ihsan ‘Abd Al-Quddus and other Egyptian romantic writers. This love for books was so strong that Thurayya spent all her money on books. This was after all a family failing.

Her brother Salman also read passionately and Thurayya suffered terribly because of his reluctance to lend her books deeply hidden in a chest. Despite the insistence he did not give in, claiming that they were not books for her. Yet Thurayya’s passions and curiosity were stronger, for when her brother was not at home she would creep to the chest and devour the books. One day her brother, upon catching her reading his books, relented and she was free to make use of his book collection. At this time she was equally reading detective stories by Agatha Christie.

She was not to neglect her own creativity the stimulus for which was often school competitions. When a short story competition was announced she wrote a short story on a subject distant from Kuwaiti reality: *I wrote at that time about a poor girl living at a railway station who one day found a parcel of jewels and then became the subject of a search by thieves.*<sup>6</sup> This short story gained first place and was her first literary success at school. It inspired her to work further. She subsequently wrote the short story entitled ‘*Arus al-marih*’ (The Martian’s Fiancée), with the subject matter taken from her remarkable experience. One day sitting with a friend on the roof she observed a strange flying object. Her imagination leads her to tell how on that object she manages to travel to another planet, contacts with a little green man from outer space, and experiences innumerable adventures. It

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

was then she tried to get it published in the weekly journal 'Usrati', but the manuscript was rejected. This was not to diminish her passion for writing. Thurayya's mother advised her to return to the subject of former Kuwait. Her parents had rich memories and loved to recount, so the material was endless. So slowly there was drawn up the draft and almost finished texts for an entire collection of short stories. Finalised only in the collection entitled *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat), published in May 1977. It is worth noting that Thurayya wrote these stories while still a secondary school pupil at the age of seventeen. The phenomenon of such maturity in creativity would be, and is, astonishing for any culture.

Already in 1971 she was to receive the first very important recognition-victory in a short story competition organised by the journal 'An-Nahda' for the short story *Umm Adam* (Adam's Mother). In this very same year Thurayya won second place for the short story entitled *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat) at the Culture Festival. Literary success meant that newspapers and journals became open to her. She started to write regularly for the journal 'Ar-Ra'id' where she edited her own weekly column. She also wrote for the journals 'An-Nahda' and 'Usrati'.

At the same time she was developing her artistic skills and methods, receiving in recognition numerous prizes. She took part in an exhibition in Baghdad in 1970, and in 1971 organised her first serious solo (personal) exhibition at the Kuwaiti National Museum. In 1973 her work was equally exhibited at the International Youth Festival in Berlin. These were years full of real successes and significant achievements in the field of culture. There is no need to add that the overcoming in such a short time of such difficulties both connected with the achievement of a mature approach to art as well as basic recognition in society is for a woman something exceptionally rare and successful.

Thurayya Al-Baqsmi, having become certain in her work, quickly developed creative wings. Her head was full of plans and ambition. Subject followed subject. Everything interested her as a literary subject – the past and the present, women's issues, while the imagination faithfully advanced rich and varied means for their formal solution. Awards became a huge incentive for effort and nothing could stand in the way of her future artistic development.

Soon her short stories started to be translated into foreign languages, for example '*Arus al-qamar* (A Fiancée like the Moon) was translated into Russian, Polish and even Japanese. The stories *Ya al-mashmum* (Musk) and *Ad-dumya* (The Doll), from the collection *Al-'araq al-aswad*

(The Black Sweat), were also translated into Japanese. All of her short stories were translated into Polish in the 1990s. The collection of short stories from the Iraq-Kuwaiti conflict entitled *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles) was published in English in 1995, as well as in French and Chinese in 1997.

The young Thurayya moved to study art at the Fine Arts Academy in Cairo in 1971. At this time the crowning event amongst a series of favourable circumstances was to be the acquaintance with her future husband Muhammad Al-Qadiri. Thurayya's husband was to turn out to be not only a sensitive and responsible support for the artist but equally a wise advisor in her creative proceedings. She left for Moscow with him in order to continue her artistic education. The stay in Moscow was to be the real polish for her artistic calling. She was not only able to develop her abilities while studying but she actively participated in the artistic life of the Russian capital. She took part in the exhibition premiers and artistic events of the city. She studied graphics at the Surikov Institute in Moscow for seven years. In Cairo she widened her literary knowledge of the works of writers close to her cultural roots. She became acquainted there with the works of the Lebanese writer and painter Gibran Khalil Gibran, who was a superb painter and writer. While in Moscow she got to know the superb works of Feodor Dostoyevsky and Anton Chekhov. She herself says: *I did not like to read about war. I always preferred romances.*<sup>7</sup> In reading these words it is difficult to eradicate reflection upon her later work so strongly tied to the events of war, which she was not meant to avoid.

It was here during her period in Moscow that her husband persuaded her to publish her first collection of short stories entitled *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat). This collection was to appear, as already mentioned, in 1977. It was published with the co-operation of the Ministry of Information. There was prominent at this time an atmosphere of artistic achievements connected with her person. Her literary initiatives gave rise to wonder and surprise. Yet it was to be the visual arts that were to dominate during this period. There was to take place an eleven-year break in literary creativity, equally linked to the birth of her daughter Ghadir in 1976.

The transfer of her husband to the diplomatic mission in Zaire (at present the Democratic Republic of the Congo) was linked to her first

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



individual exhibition (outside of Kuwait) in 1978. In 1980 Thurayya finished her studies and left for Senegal where her husband was head of the diplomatic mission. They remained there until 1984. It was there that her two subsequent daughters were born: Fattuma in 1981 and Munira in 1983. Despite the responsibilities of being a mother and the wife of a diplomat, Thurayya prepared for her next personal exhibition. Her subsequent foreign showing was in Tunisia also in 1982.

In 1984 Thurayya Al-Baqsamī returned to Kuwait and permanent jobs in the press where she not only wrote articles but also provided illustrations e.g. for the journal 'Al-'Arabi' and the newspapers: 'Al-Watan' and 'Al-Qabas'. For the latter she was to write for two years satirical short stories that described the daily events of Kuwait.

Despite the fact that in 1988 she published her second collection of short stories entitled *As-Sidra* (The Lotus Tree) she has to overcome views which put preference on her artistic achievements. And here there is nothing strange for Thurayya is by education a painter, she did not study literature. Everywhere in the world one has to fight for one's place in relation to others as equally oneself, to achieve the right to express one's own thoughts, achieve conviction about the worth and necessity of one's own literary work in public life. One needs to be certain of the universal values of one's own actions, and this is not easy when one is a woman and when one's work deals with difficult social relations within one's own country.

The years 1984–1990 see an unusual enlivenment in publishing activity for which looking after her three children offered no obstacle. Numerous trips with exhibitions all over the world made access to museums, current artistic trends and artistic personalities easier for Thurayya. She could examine modern European artistic currents. In her autobiographical statements she devotes a lot of space to her fascination with painting. She is bewitched by Picasso, whom she admires as equally for his dynamism as his way of presentation: the synthetic but equally multidimensional developed image – present in all the motifs of his art. She is especially taken by the formulation of women. Matisse strikes her as an oriental painter. She marvels at his use of blue. She observes and is inspired in Gauguin by his naïveté. Her literary inspiration is drawn from eastern literature, Russian literature, though also the works of Ernest Hemingway and Émile Zola.

The tragedy of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait interrupted such a happy and creatively led life. The family situation drastically changed. Thurayya was left alone with the children when her husband was taken prisoner. Given this state of things writing appeared impossible, for it was danger-

ous, but not for Thurayya al-Baqsemi. She wrote and painted, constantly changing her place of abode. After the fortunate return home of her husband she left for Cyprus where she resolved to devote herself to writing. In a series of short stories she records the tragic days of the invasion, her own fate and that of Kuwaiti society. Thus, in 1992, arose the third collection of short stories *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles), for which – as the first woman – she was awarded the prize of the Kuwaiti Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). This book was recognised as the best collection of short stories describing the drama of war. It is worth emphasising that the collection was translated into English by Mr. William Fullerton, the British ambassador to Kuwait.

The fourth collection of short stories published in 1994 and entitled *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight) deals equally with the invasion, with Thurayya herself considering it to be a mature work possessing an interesting artistic form.

In 1992 Thurayya published a fairy tale for children entitled *Muzakkirat Fattuma al-kuwaytiyya as-saghira* (Recollections of a Small Kuwaiti Fattuma), which is the story of the occupation seen through the eyes of a child. In 1997 Thurayya Al-Baqsemi received for this book an ennobling state prize. She is equally the author of a book entitled *Al-marsam al-hurr wa rihla 25 'aman* (Free Painting in the Course of 25 Years) which deals with contemporary Kuwaiti painting.

What is striking in Thurayya is her attitude in relation to her place in society as a writer and painter. She is left to constantly reiterate her own talent and credentials as a writer. Thurayya al-Baqsemi constantly develops and surprises her admirers. In 1999 she displayed her poetic talent by publishing her first collection of poetry entitled *Fi kaffi 'usfura zarqa'* (The Blue Sparrow on my Palm). It is difficult to say how she will surprise us in the future, for she is so multifaceted. Thurayya is one of those creators for whom creativity and life are separated by an equals sign.

She is a citizen of the world occupying an honoured place amongst writers, painters and poets. She is unique because she does not imitate. She tries to be innovative everywhere. It is difficult to assign her to a specific current, and through her literary and artistic creativity she is witness to the changes taking place in Kuwaiti society.

# The Collection of Short Stories

## *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat)

The Stories from the collection *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat)<sup>1</sup>, as a result of the varied theme matter create at the same time their own composition as well as a compendium of knowledge about Kuwait and Kuwaitis, an image of social life from the period preceding the oil boom. As the author herself writes and recalls she wanted in the collection to present *the customs, way of life, work and belief in superstitions*.<sup>2</sup> Hence each short story deals with a different matter or subject. Thanks to which these short stories build up in fragments, almost in a documentary way, a reconstruction of the past which has gone yet remains present, below the surface, within the mentality of contemporary Kuwaiti society. So what is the image presented to us? It is the already generally well-known profile of a society varied materially and ethnically, where the fate of children and their future is basically foreseen from the moment they are born. If someone was born into a shopkeeper's family then the most fantastic thing that fate could deliver him is either the inheritance of the family fortune, or an attempt to organise his own, although a modest stall with sweets, cakes, musk etc. Attempts to transcend one's social position are on the whole condemned to failure. We can see this in the short story *Ad-dumya* (The Doll),<sup>3</sup> where we are witnesses to the maturing of childish consciousness, which in the enthusiasm for play and friendship slowly starts to discern the cruel details concerning the disproportion of the position of its friend 'Abd Allah.

This short story leads us, among other things, well into the world of children from opposite social spheres, where *disappointment in the adult world* is at this age commonly held. Both girls and boys are unable to ac-

<sup>1</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Al-'araq al-aswad*, Kuwait 1977.

<sup>2</sup> On the basis of an interview conducted with Thurayya Al-Baqsamī by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska in Kuwait on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1994.

<sup>3</sup> The short story *Ad-dumya* from the collection *Al-'araq al-aswad*, pp. 58–67.

cept the world of adults – corrupted by historical and social egoism. For a child the sharp division into rich and poor, girls and boys is at odds with all conceptions of the goodness of the world, people and the influence of Holy Scriptures. While secretly visiting a boy's house the girl notices the differences in social and material status. From her first-hand account there emerges an image of daily life at various levels of the social ladder.

'Abd Allah's house was made of mud. I had never been there before because of some disagreement between our mothers. It is nicer than our house. It's got straight walls, without nooks and there are no holes where mice live. I was taken with the front door decorated with beautiful clout-nails;  
'Abd Allah, where did you get this door?  
My father trades in wood and brought it from India.  
You can feel the wealth in your house. Colourful carpets, copper and glass antiques in the alcoves. How poor our house is in comparison, the fumes, the corners filled with the henna and herbs mother uses to dye her hair.<sup>4</sup>

There weighs on the children, besides the drafted and imminent sentence of being unable to play, the responsibility of early marriage, as equally valid these days. The girl rebels against this premature entry into adulthood, into what she sees as the cruelty of this life. But after all the independently made doll is totally equal to the boy's kite. The toys exchanged by them symbolically illustrate their enchanted, unlimited relation of friendship and partnership in play. The doll unexpectedly dug up in the sand on the beach was probably buried before the boy's departure for India. She sadly recalls his tragic fate which so quickly took him away from her.

There awaits boys who enter adulthood another necessity: maintaining a family. This subject gains especial clarity in the title story *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat).<sup>5</sup> The story is saturated with the mood of fear, torment, threat and danger. The boy's tragic situation is encapsulated in the words:

Why is my soul exhausted? Why is it troubled? It must know that I am one of those society views as strange! I belong to that group of people who do not understand the meaning of the word rest and never are able to be satisfied.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

<sup>5</sup> The short story *Al-'araq al-aswad*, *op.cit.*, pp. 68–77.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

It is no wonder that such a story so radiating force, gained second prize at the culture festival in 1971. Accusations put into the mouth of a child condemning the mechanisms of social exploitation ring far truer to the conscience of the reader – even the reader of a different historical past and ethnicity. The pronouncement – the boy's internal monologue – deals with the complaints of the situation of the poor in poor societies. The short story is saturated with a real analysis of this injustice which produces, from the various participants of this divine spectacle, poor and rich, the used and the users:

I have often asked myself the question: what is the difference between myself and the owner of the shop? After all if I had a shop we would be equal, and may be I'd be even more important. I'm quick, I learn things easily, so who knows what would be if I had had the possibility to have an education. Possibly I would be the best in my district. I can't remember who said that the poor are stupid because if they had just a little wits they wouldn't be poor. If they only allowed me to live in a just society and in better conditions I'd show he who said that which of us is stupid.<sup>7</sup>

The importance of the problem has to be admitted by every honest reader. And although we clearly see violence in extreme situations, from the border of life and death – as in our short story – this, the problem of human chances, is one met in every place on earth. The short story *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat) is a graphic tragic short story image, a cutting from an evening incident of a young boy. The hero – working hard to earn the keep for his mother and orphaned children – in free reflection submits to the mood of the place where he rests after work and worries. He submerges himself also in existential reflection and worries. The place where he rests is an old mosque, from the moment of its construction surrounded by the legend of the ghosts of those who died during its construction. The boy easily gives in to such a mood. Exhausted by work and bad conditions he experiences in this state, half dream – half real, an almost physical threat to his own life which would have meant the annihilation of the whole family; his unemployed mother and brothers and sisters. To the typical miseries of his situation is added one more: the inability to buy or search for a wife, for he is simply too poor. He is accompanied by loneliness and it seems to him that only ghosts can be interested in talking to him – a talk during which he is able to share the

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

bitterness of his position where he does not have enough to live on and where the difference in possessions leads to degeneration in human relations and feelings. However, the ghosts are not certain either. There is no guarantee that the ghost of the sailor who died while building the mosque has good intentions. The shadow on the wall is associated by the boy with an attacker. He shakes with fear about the future of his poor family and hugs the wall looking for protection against the aggression of his own subconscious.

The short stories that present details from the lives of women and girls in Kuwait appear to be interesting and colourful. This side of life – despite the fact that the author was brought up differently – was a side of life well known to her. In the short story *Yā al-mashmum* (Musk)<sup>8</sup> the social division is into Bedouins and people from the town. The division unavoidably creates social and individual life dramas where women are foremostly affected. But it does not avoid men. The heroine of the short story *Yā al-mashmum* (Musk) stamped by her origin says:

Women rest in their homes, give birth like sheep, fill the stomachs of their husbands with food. There is no one here who could guarantee them safety and safeguard the future. ...Oh, if I were a wife and mother but men shudder at the thought of marrying me. They all are thinking the same, just like my stupid friend. Our boys have no idea as to how a Bedouin woman knows how to love.<sup>9</sup>

The heroine relentlessly stands for hours at the bazaar praising the musk that brings such charm to the men returning from work. The welcoming women smell of musk which hides the smell of the sheep and cow excrement. The heroine has as the accompaniment for her drama a singer who comes from a rich family of gold dealers. The beloved boy is, however, without work. They differ too much for fate to join them. For the time being he revels in her appearance and fervently buys musk from her dreaming love dreams: *I love every vein pumping blood in your body. I crave the warm femininity of your eyes.*<sup>10</sup> His songs are the only reprieve from his desire: *No one is able to understand me. This is why I love my wooden lute. It is my courageous voice thanks to which I can express my love for her. Without it I am dumb.*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The short story *Yā al-mashmum*, *op.cit.*, pp. 6–19.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

The story's final brings news of the boy's suicide, who breaks down, not agreeing to the plans his family has for him. Ahmad's and the musk-seller Bedouin's tragic love dies not only because their families are anti such a union. It dies equally because of indecision and deliberation, a lack of faith in the possibility of overcoming barriers and life, although with difficulties, together. In the tragic final of the story the heroine says: *My pride and prejudice subdued his poor heart*.<sup>12</sup>

Thurayya Al-Baqsamī's short stories initiate us also into the lives of women of time past. And so the short story *Umm Adam* (Adam's Mother)<sup>13</sup> tells the story of a slave girl once married by her owner, later widowed, who:

did not want to leave so as not to be far from the clay grave of her husband's remains. The years pass, and she lives in this little hen house and has no one near except for a mass of black cats that she herself has raised.<sup>14</sup>

There is nothing enviable about the fate of single women suspected of witchcraft in a cruel society. The witch *Umm Adam* sees as if the possibility of an unjust death and orders a child that knows how to write to write out her name. And when the blows of the degenerate children catch up with her in her dead hand there remains the piece of paper with information about who she was.

Suspense and risk are equally connected with the marvellous moments of life as is shown in the short story *'Arus al-qamar* (A Fiancée like the Moon),<sup>15</sup> *My mother got married when she was only eleven years old and gave birth to my brother Salih when she was thirteen*.<sup>16</sup> In the quoted story the anxiety experienced by the future bride, who does not know what her husband is going to look like, assumes a vision either advanced by her jealous sister, or by the whispers of neighbours. She oscillates between the *fear that his face is wrinkled like a potato skin, and his hair is still wet with the black dye*,<sup>17</sup> and the fear that if he is as

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> The short story *Umm Adam*, *op.cit.*, pp. 20–25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> The short story *'Arus al-qamar*, *op.cit.*, pp. 26–31.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

beautiful as the moon then *he will quickly become bored with his wife and seek another*.<sup>18</sup>

The short story mentioned earlier, entitled *Ad-dumya* (The Doll), contains a delicately drawn sad story of friendship between children often stamped with suffering and 'forced' egoism. They contain equally a clear insight into the daily life of women. While doing the washing, washing hair, applying henna we meet the whole of female society while their children are absorbed in play and collecting shells from the sea.

In these short stories Thurayya Al-Baqsmi has formulated, in an unusually varied way, the entirety of 'the soul' and social reality of the time. Amidst the leading motifs, social inequality is the most often met, presented as the reason for the division of feelings and people as in the short stories *Ya al-mashmum* (Musk) and *Ad-dumya* (The Doll). The drama of those underage, as prematurely burdened with the requirements of a dated and cruel social system, is presented in the short stories: *Al-mulabbas* (The Sweet), *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat), and *Al-mulla* (The Teacher).<sup>19</sup>

The short story *Al-mulla* (The Teacher) concerns the experiences of an adolescent boy amongst malicious and sneering individuals: the teacher and brother-in-law. Especially unpleasant is the two-faced nature of school education. Amidst the lofty recitation of the Koran there takes place on a daily basis cruelty, canning, beating, a ban on going out as well as an unjustified ban on bathing in the sea. The teacher's punishments are disproportionate to the behaviour, while the slander of the brother-in-law does not correspond to reality. They are simply hideous lies with the aim of crushing the hero and bringing about his even worst treatment at school. This is a cruel cultural image which proves that the normality and ordinariness of an average life is unable to express itself either at school or in the family.

In the second half of the story the atmosphere somewhat clears up what is connected with the boy's decision to run away. His health and life are endangered on the solitary and dangerous wanderings through the desert, but the Bedouins whom he meets take him in and warmly receive him. They take great care of him, with the women feeding him as if he were their own son. At last his beloved father arrives, although so badly

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>19</sup> The short story *Al-mulla*, *op.cit.*, pp. 48–57.



treated by the brother-in-law. The father protects he from him himself, from his sorrow and shame. May be in the future he will teach him how to protect himself from the hostility of one's surroundings.

In the short story *Al-fazi'a* (Alarm)<sup>20</sup> there appears the motif of the social solidarity of Kuwaiti society in the face of the threat of war. The attitudes concerning the changing reality are very clearly demonstrated. The story deals with the period of the First World War and is a small scene from the life of arms smugglers. A boat laden to the brim with arms and Kuwaitis who have eternally been employed in such ways is pursued by an English boat which is to stop the arms reaching the enemy. The load reaches its destination by the use of cunning. In order to hide the tracks they burn cans. The next piece of cunning is the dragging of the boat onto the bank and camouflaging its recent operation through the appearance of repair work and painting. The attempt to unmask the smugglers was defeated by the deft and effective action of the whole group.

Thurayya Al-Baqṣami's short stories are fully grounded in the superstitious belief in demons, genies, evil spirits who make life difficult and are the cause of unfortunate events like for instance in the short stories *Umm Adam* (Adam's Mother) or *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat). But already in the short story *Al-mulabbas* (The Sweet)<sup>21</sup> this way of experiencing the world is disclosed as unrealistic and not in accordance with what actually happens. The revolt of the young hero against lying and wickedness is by nature fully active and his inquisitiveness and integrity bring forth victory. The short story deals with a young sweet seller who is terrified by fear and the threat of losing his job or being attacked by thieves. The place where he works is not highly reputed. Yet he faces up to all the adversities and does not give in to the pressure of the stories heard, and he hits a thief who steals a sweet in the back with a wooden board. Although it was a genie the boy reacts in accordance with what he feels. The end of the short story brings the hero victory and rather victory for the law although the person recognised as the thief withdraws his false accusations. The bad genie or simply a base man is punished while the boy is given the chance to prove it.

The great quality of these short stories is the colourful narration which is chiefly concentrated on the emphasis of the individual experiences of

<sup>20</sup> The short story *Al-Fazi'a*, *op.cit.*, pp. 42–47.

<sup>21</sup> The short story *Al-mulabbas*, *op.cit.*, pp. 32–41.

the literary characters, who in the majority are young representatives of Kuwaiti society. The writer judges society with their eyes, utterances and hearts full of hope.

The short stories under consideration contain numerous autobiographical references, for example the short story *Al-mulabbas* (The Sweet), for the author herself says: *I wrote under the influence of father who told me what happened at the bazaar. He had a shop with sweets which he used to make himself. There were cakes similar to biscuits, which were called "buqsum" hence the family name Al-Baqsami.*<sup>22</sup>

A similar motif is contained in the short story *Ya al-mashmum* (Musk). The motif of being orphaned and the necessity to work for the eldest boy in *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat) was also taken by Thurayya from her own life; for her father already as a twelve-year-old boy had to keep his mother and brothers and sisters.

All the short stories are very much realistic. They are taken on the whole from the actual family life observed and experienced by the author. The stories are branded with artistic creativity displayed by the author with passion and expressiveness. This is visible also in the constructions of the short stories which are saturated with light and shades of colour which both darken and lighten in accordance with the course of the thematic events. This manifests itself equally in the generally present artistic creativity of the author. Her unusually emotional approach to life is a feature common to both literary and artistic creativity. In one of the interviews Thurayya reiterates this in the words: *I feel life strongly.*<sup>23</sup> Following a reading of her short stories one is left with the impression of a distinct and strengthened representation of life, through the strength of her power, full of her own formulas, yet always discreet and balanced, full of human dignity.

<sup>22</sup> On the basis of an interview conducted with Thurayya Al-Baqsami.

<sup>23</sup> Nirmala Janssen, *A certain frame of mind. Heart on canvas*, Kuwait in: 'Arab Times', December 1992.

# The Collection of Short Stories

## *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree)

Thurayya Al-Baqsmi in the short stories from the collection *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree)<sup>1</sup> undertakes a varied set of problems, with the descriptive fragments of reality being as if sketched with an economic yet expressive stroke. They are images taken so to say straight from the exuberant and lively current of life and the singular events that occur in it. All of them possess some conveyor of content which concentrates the reader's imagination and attention; a word or subject symbol which gives the stories their distinctive flavour. They constitute a bridge joining the author's creative thought in the face of the reader open to its symbolic reading. For how does one defy the notion of *a bat*<sup>2</sup> which in the short story of the same title is an ascribed secret, dangerous meeting. Meetings of happy lovers, for they are deprived the *daily light of love*. Or remain indifferent to the obsessive use here of the motif of 'cockroaches' in the short story entitled *As-sursur* (The Cockroach).<sup>3</sup> The ever appearing cockroach rhythmically maintains the climate of hostility, threat and repugnance. The remaining short stories are similar in construction, where the central place is occupied by: the lotus tree in the short story *As-sidra* (Lotus Tree),<sup>4</sup> a frog in the short story *Ad-dyfdā'* (The Frog),<sup>5</sup> colourful palms in the short story *Buq'at lawn* (The Colourful Stain),<sup>6</sup> a shoulder in *Al-katf* (The Arm).<sup>7</sup>

The short story *As-sursur* (The Cockroach) revolves on a fairly closed thematic circle. The obsession with cockroaches which the heroine has had since childhood accompanies her increasingly comfortable lifestyle,

<sup>1</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsmi, *As-sidra*, Kuwait 1988.

<sup>2</sup> The short story *Al-hafafish* from the collection *As-sidra*, pp. 41–46.

<sup>3</sup> The short story *As-sursur*, *op.cit.*, pp. 7–14.

<sup>4</sup> The short story *As-sidra*, *op.cit.*, pp. 15–22.

<sup>5</sup> The short story *Ad-dyfdā'*, *op.cit.*, pp. 23–27.

<sup>6</sup> The short story *Buq'at lawn*, *op.cit.*, pp. 35–40.

<sup>7</sup> The short story *Al-katf*, *op.cit.*, pp. 29–34.

and becomes the chief content of the story. The cockroaches here described – almost symbolic – disturb, however, the real life of the heroine, they lead to personal failures: the breaking off of an engagement, not allowing her to live in peace, and finally threatening her health: *My thoughts oscillated around cockroach funerals. I imagined that that cockroach with the brown antenna was lying peacefully amidst the plants, and when I got close to him he ironically moved his antenna, smiled and said: I'm still alive! I live!*<sup>8</sup>

In the last scent the heroine weakens as a result of the disinfectant applied everywhere. She reels at the sight of the last cockroach flying from the bag:

She searched the corners in the bathroom, the beds, the drawers. Then she collapsed exhausted into a chair laughing aloud: the cockroaches are dead. They're dust! Her head started to ache strongly. She didn't like something. She put her hand into her bag searching for painkillers. Her hand touched as if a smooth back. Suddenly he flew out of the bag and ran along her arm. Fear left her mouth open and screaming. She waved her arms and ran in the direction of the bed, while he flew off to the bathroom.<sup>9</sup>

This obstinate importunate and sensual portrayal makes the short story rich in expression. It possesses an unusual and strange mood for a European. Thurayya has managed, in a masterly way, to evoke in the reader of the story disgust:

She confidently placed the key in the lock. She pushed the door hard. She was taken by the strong smell of the chemicals she had scattered before leaving. She stopped to examine the semi-yellow leaves of the flowers. She started to sob on touching the dead canary and fish. She felt no remorse however. She would be able to make up for all the losses. The most important thing being that the cockroaches were dead.<sup>10</sup>

The title story *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree) is a sad tale of a man who is eaten up by a sick dislike for his future daughter-in-law:

He was so deep in thought that he didn't even notice when a cone fell on his head. The whole time he thought about Sara who was loved reciprocally by his son. On

<sup>8</sup> The short story *As-sursur*, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

the wedding night he had welcomed her with a grimace and furrowed brow. He had announced that he was totally against the marriage.<sup>11</sup>

When, despite all the obstacles put on his part, the marriage went ahead he deluded himself that maybe Sara would turn out to be a bad girl and his beloved son would split up from her:

On the wedding day Marzuq had a terrible headache and stomach-ache. He wanted to do anything to avoid the crowd waiting to congratulate him. He yearned for something terrible to happen that would bring shame on the bride and her family. He wanted Bilal to emerge after the wedding night with a white sheet to prove the immorality of the woman. His dreams, however, were to remain unfulfilled, and Bilal adored his wife.<sup>12</sup>

The defeated Marzuq could find relief only under his lotus tree. It was to this tree that he told all of his mysteries, he talked to it and sought advice. The lotus had one more advantage – it shared his hatred of his daughter-in-law: *After all the lotus shared all of his anxieties and hatred for the woman who had enchanted his son. The lotus knew about Marzuq's dislike of Sara and her family.*<sup>13</sup>

All of the tensions were eased by the lady of the palace in which Marzuq and all of his family worked. The lady of the house was the only person whom he respected and he carried out all of her bidding without any reservation. Despite this the psychological state of the hero deteriorated until he went mad. The short story presents the dependence between parents and children as well as the unshakeable authority of the father who does not want to agree that his son is already a grown man and is able to make his own decisions with regard to his future. This situation gives rise to conflicts the victims of which are the innocent. The short story is however optimistic. Despite the opposition and plotting of the father his son's marriage was a success and full of happiness.

The hero of the short story *Ad-dyfa'* (The Frog) is a young man enormously in love. He suffers because of a so to say enforced period abroad with the aim of earning money to please his fiancée. The short story is painted symbolically, while at the same time directly, in relation to the bitter fate of the hero, an honest man, who is sentenced to suffer

<sup>11</sup> The short story *As-sidra*, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18,

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

by the greed of the woman he loves: *I want to have a big wardrobe with a large mirror! A bed with a wooden headboard and carved flowers! I want...croak... I want... croak ... that daily croaking of my future wife has meant that I have to go off and earn just in order to appease her desires. I am a simple man who loves the clean sky and earth on which I grew up.*<sup>14</sup>

His life is time and again disturbed by the strange croaking – the symbol of the low order nature of amphibians which in our story signals the croaking of a woman demanding material things. This fact wrecks disinterested and spiritual love. The croaking which drove him from his homeland catches up with him abroad threatening the love for the woman. It forces him to return, and the reader has to make his own mind up as to who is victorious: love or the croaking.

The short story *Al-katf* (The Arm) takes us into the world of a lonely woman. Despite the fact that she is deprived of a male arm to give her a sense of safety and happiness she manages very well in life. And her fate is unusual for a woman from this cultural circle. For lack of parental permission to marry, resulting from differences in the material or social status of the partners, is widespread today. And the fact that the heroine is not directed and beset by parents, brothers and other members of the family gives her also a greater sense of freedom. The fact that she can dream about great love and ordinary intimacy, as oppose to the submissive acceptance of one's fate is a new perspective for women in the contemporary Arab world. Despite the fact that she has to go to another town in order to enter a cafe she is still able to safely move about and search for her own fulfilment. In reading the short story one is under the impression that here is a hunter and not a passive victim. She is within it all brave and confident:

Now she became a hunter. She fired against all tradition. She invited a man for dinner without asking him where he came from. Swimming over his face and wrinkles she reached his mouth. She yearned to lay her head on his shoulder. Her romantic journey was interrupted upon touching his enormous belly.<sup>15</sup>

The men in her life do not share her suffering however, nor struggle for the experience of love nor inspired moments. They do not offer a shoulder

<sup>14</sup> The short story *Ad-dyfdā'*, *op.cit.*, pp. 23–24.

<sup>15</sup> The short story *Al-katf*, *op.cit.*, pp. 30–32.

which could isolate her from her lonely fate and fulfil her dreams. The end of the short story leaves us uncertain. The desire to dance to candle light is unsatisfied, while the candle extinguished in a 'gloomy gesture' represents again the total growth of hope of being together, two in harmony.

In the short story *Buq'at lawn* (The Colourful Stain) we are also presented with an unconventional image of a woman – though different – a woman elegant and exceptional. This type of entanglement and dependence is well known to all. They are women, whom the fate allowed to practice art. The heroine works both professionally and creatively. Her frustration is doubled when the obligations of her professional routine eliminate for a period the possibility to freely create:

Her sudden exit was suspicious. She felt like a fish which had swallowed a hook. She discards her sceptre for since she started to work her wings are paralysed, while the halo has fallen from her head, which transferred to the clock that indicated her murderous routine. Time started to tie her hands with the minutes. She yearned to create, but they wanted to bury her talent.<sup>16</sup>

In the sphere of artistic activity it results in the expression of fear of time, authenticity, spontaneity and the artistic form. Art on the whole is a very despotic controller of the efforts and time of every artist. It demands total devotion. This interweaves results in our heroine in a nervous, although periodic inability to work creatively. The colourful stains on the canvas give her no peace:

I feel fine, but unrest plagues me. A bad spirit has entered me which haunts me because of the colourful stains left on the white canvas. The whiteness of the image calls me to help. You cannot imagine the ugliness of these stains. If I stay here for a few hours more the ugliness will penetrate me. Then penetrate the office, the papers. It will envelop everything even the hands of the clock which pierce us.<sup>17</sup>

Bitter reflection on life, the rest is almost fulfilled with a torture of grey everydayness and the posthumous success of Van Gogh's art. In such a situation we have the choice of the type of suffering: reproaches because of the low productivity of work, fears that the effort will not bring results, and if they do then too late. Finally fear over the maintaining of a life which falls short of artistic activity. In this short story the intimate sphere of life has been completely buried, remaining at one with the psychologi-

<sup>16</sup> The short story *Buq'at lawn*, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

cal law that being an artist can replace the family and personal condition. Yet when this is expressed by an Arab woman then it is an expression of great and natural emancipation through art and for art.

*Al-hafafish* (The Bats) is a beautifully poetic and emotional short story about true feelings, love and helplessness. It takes place during an hour or two during which the young lovers are in the car, the one place where they can guarantee to be together. The darkness and closeness of the threatening sea paralyses the girl's feelings and the words of love and devotion fail to arouse her. They secretly envy everybody hidden behind the glowing windows of the houses and hotels:

The summer sky sails into darkness. It seems as if a paper moon has hidden itself between the jaws of the town surrounded by a necklace of lights. While he escapes from the lights while the sky gives a chance of showing oneself to the last star. Sitting behind the steering wheel he seeks darkness. Next to him sits a slight body with a woman's face, dishevelled hair and eyes full of fear.<sup>18</sup>

They are however so entangled in their suddenly 'frozen' feelings that they do not notice the actual danger. They are encircled by a patrol on the watch for banned signs of love. The metaphor of the 'bat' as beings defencelessly moving – like they are – chiefly in the darkness, as well as suddenly being blinded by light will remain in one's memory for a long time. It demonstrates to us that despite the growing freedoms the final word has yet to come. The word is freedom which allows free movement for those in love, while at the same time does not allow great feelings to die restricted by the lack of silence and distance, the lack of protection, and even the dirty attack of the hostile streets of a great modern city: *My little one, I hate darkness, but for you my darling I have become a bat in love with the darkness. You are the only star which lights for me in the firmament of the heart.*<sup>19</sup>

The last short story in the collection *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree) is *As-safa* (The Blow) which is the study of a marriage of many years and the growing coldness of feelings and genuine contacts: *He lies with his back to her. Her feelings for him are like sunken ships. She yearns to kiss his back, but it's hard. His rough hand with hard fingers avoids all kissing which might be the introduction to making love. She feels that her man is very*

<sup>18</sup> The short story *Al-hafafish*, *op.cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.



*cold*.<sup>20</sup> The disappearance of intimate desires on the part of her husband is painfully felt by his wife who in a dramatic way says: *I was as beautiful as a goddess and as sweet as honey*.<sup>21</sup>

Although the uttering of this is dramatic how much poetry and delicacy is there in this presentation in relation to a related European situation. The heroine slowly extinguishes and starts to change into ash dispersed over the walls. The short story astounds with its unusual temperature the feelings of the heroine who courageously loves, suffers, overcoming her husband's desire to leave her and finally resisting the news of a second secret marriage of her husband's, about which she discovers after his death:

Suddenly a beautiful, swarthy, handsome woman entered the flat, who appeared to be sad. In her arms she caressed a two-year-old child. She asked in a sad voice: – Where are Umm Fafid and his siblings? Family? Has he not said anything about me? I am your daughter-in-law, and this is your grandson. We got married in Casablanca three years ago.<sup>22</sup>

The heroine while dancing at the noisy funeral overcomes the last obstacle – despair, tears, as well as the disappointment brought about by truth.

Symbol idioms play an extremely important function in the short stories of Thurayya Al-Baqsmi. They fulfil a unifying function in relation to the unusually limited dialogue, often concealed within the action's course and the economical narrative of the short stories. The rhythmical repetition of the symbolic axes of the short stories gives them features of dynamism, uniformity, as well as features of artistic qualities. The high attempt on the part of the author at artistic sensitivity results in numerous associations, while one can detect in the rhythmic appearance of symbolic motives possible elements of musicality. Often the symbol-motives rise to a crescendo right up until the culminating sounding, for instance in the short stories *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree), *As-sursur* (The Cockroach), *As-saf'a* (The Blow).

All the stories touch upon the problem of evil. They do not moralise, they do not schematise reasons, motives, or facts but with masterly sensitivity reveal its existence. The means of the internal character of evil is already totally modern. We feel the discord and vigilant presence of protest. Thurayya never produces a tone of consent for one or another

<sup>20</sup> The short story *As-Saf'a*, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

course of events. Events in which evil comes to the fore are in the majority of stories very similar in every geographical latitude: discord over low social standard,<sup>23</sup> the constraint of a high material level,<sup>24</sup> the dissent of parents over the choice of partners,<sup>25</sup> the absence of conditions for the development of harmonious love.<sup>26</sup>

There are amongst these elitist experiences of the East and West. Here we have the fear of losing artistic invention as a result of overwork. Here equally is the repugnance for conformist and hypocritical behaviour in relation to the art of creative artists, together with disgust for material speculation following their death.<sup>27</sup> All of this behaviour does not allow for the manifestation of real life full of potential – it allows for no happiness. The short story *Al-haqafish* (The Bats) is still in part submerged in a social climate more reminiscent of an eastern scene than of a western one, though equally constituting the reason for a new updated hero of women's literature. Women already possess independence and to a greater or lesser extent they show it. They are already sure of their feelings which enter into their psychological life and start to influence reality.<sup>28</sup> The characters of the women are sketched extremely delicately and chiefly through a synthetic shortening of imagination – symbols.

There is no proclivity for subjects specifically female. The drawbacks of the situations and characters affect women as equally as men.<sup>29</sup> There is also not much suspended action in these short stories, for the sake of events neutral in character and occurring usually in the intervals between dialogues. This is not the author's intention. Thurayya Al-Baqsmi being as equally involved in the problem of evil as Anton Chekhov or Albert Camus in Europe does not point to ways for its solution. Yet through her quiet, yet involved literature she protests against the social, individual and personal conditioning that her heroes undergo.

<sup>23</sup> The short story *As-sidra*, *op.cit.*

<sup>24</sup> The short story *Ad-dyfta*, *op.cit.*

<sup>25</sup> The short story *Al-katf*, *op.cit.*

<sup>26</sup> The short story *Al-haqafish*, *op.cit.*

<sup>27</sup> The short story *Buq'at lawn*, *op.cit.*

<sup>28</sup> The short story *Al-katf*, *op.cit.*

<sup>29</sup> The short story *As-saf'a*, *op.cit.*

# The Collection of Short Stories *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles)

Thurayya Al-Baqsamī's collection of short stories *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles)<sup>1</sup> is in its entirety devoted to the Iraqi armed military intervention in Kuwait and an analysis of the literary situation of Kuwaitis during the occupation. The very motto, the poetical dedication to the collection, introducing the collection, reveals the chief idea of the work:

Scythes of war harvested innocent souls,  
Pure blood perfumed the fields of the Nation,  
To make grow tombstones of acts of heroism,  
Towering like golden stalks of wheat,  
I dedicate memories like embers  
To the stalks of Kuwaiti heroism.<sup>2</sup>

The metaphor of *tombstones of acts of heroism, towering like golden stalks of wheat* in a resounding way portrays the war tragedy that the author witnessed and participated in. Thurayya's sensitive heart, that of a writer and poet, has meant that even in the most difficult of situations she is able with her heart to bring into existence something what allows her to maintain hope. The wheat sheaves are in fact the harvest of death, yet they symbolise real heroism, discord for the disturbing of dignity, in fact the life of an independent soul.

In the short story *Zaman al-inhidar* (Time of Decline)<sup>3</sup> there is a study of a woman's feelings who as a result of the occupation of the city by the invaders loses her sense of reality – of a reality which is unable to fulfil basic human requirements:

After time had declined, body and name, she lay in her warm bed, ate, slept, got up and observed her beautiful head through an opening in the workshop door.

<sup>1</sup> Thurayya al-Baqsamī, *Shumu' as-saradib*, Kuwait 1992, 1<sup>st</sup> edition.

<sup>2</sup> Thurayya al-Baqsamī, *ibid.*, Dedication, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> The short story *Zaman al-inhidar*, *op.cit.*, pp. 7–15.

She asked people and family sitting round the radios: Is there any new news?  
When will the Iraqis leave? The reply was: Nothing new! They're not going! <sup>4</sup>

The heroine steeped in the lethargy of inactivity, isolation, in an act of desperation throws out her alarm clock; for time in such a life, time in the awfulness of war has no longer any sense for her:

She had not participated in the town's fall, but she participated in the maintenance of this state which led her to throw her alarm clock through the window. She had taken into account the fact that through this she would not be getting up for work. Anyway who requires an alarm clock when time has been destroyed?<sup>5</sup>

In the course of the short story there takes place within the heroine – as a result of her contact with a friend and her account of the resistance movement – a change which sees the conquering of the passivity and her full involvement in the distribution of texts giving expression to courage and belying the customary imagination.

The short story acts as a carrier for numerous intercultural associations, of which two come to the fore. There are the passivity of the heroine's experiences and the almost prophetic vision of Salvador Dali's picture 'The Persistence of Memory'. The considerations of time which are interwoven throughout the short story, whose transitoriness was suggested by Dali, represent a metaphorical platform and concentrate attention on the symbolic image of the clock or clocks melted by the heat of the desert, of 'melted' time, already non-existing and useless:

The clock of time melts, hours fall, one after another. I recall the image of the picture 'The Persistence of Memory' by the Spanish painter Salvador Dali. In the centre of the picture stands an enormous clock, it is melting and losing its shape. It is surrounded by a terribly wild desert. The clock is melting because of the heat. This is the heat of the desert exploding in the artist's imagination.<sup>6</sup>

The story corresponds with time, or rather '*timelessness*', or the terrible '*timelessness*' disturbing the life of people and the state through aggression, military action and violence.

The second alarming association deals with the moment when the heroine decides to undertake the illegal distribution. She smuggles the secret press on the advice of her friend under her dress layering thickly to sug-

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

gest pregnancy: *Under her ample dress there is a pillow filled with illegal materials.*<sup>7</sup> Twice we find in the text associations that link with the figure of the Virgin Mary: *The Virgin Mary bore our Jesus Christ in secret,*<sup>8</sup> *Now she is pregnant with documents a Kuwaiti Virgin Mary.*<sup>9</sup> One may speculate that this is expression of Thurayya's broad cultural grounding which allows her to bring to light aiding, protective and even slightly shocking motives from history and spiritual art, in a simple unmatched way.

The short story *Arjuha ar-rahil* (The Seesaw of Departure)<sup>10</sup> is a subsequent image of the life of those inhabitants desperately agitated by their fate in an occupied country. It concerns the drama of a couple who are separated when the woman decides to leave. She wants to leave a country and place *which has lost much of its humanity and where many people have been transformed into dolls linked by strings of hope and dreams of a speedy liberation.*<sup>11</sup> The man and the woman's decisions are different. The man decides to remain where he is like many despite the fear and terror: *He whispered in her ear: My darling, you are the most valuable thing I possess, but you must understand that I also love my country. Allow me to love you both.*<sup>12</sup>

The woman, despite the fact that this is her genuine homeland, acts as her Filipino servant; after much deliberation and postponement she leaves the country and her beloved husband: *She again began to back her bags before him, and within her she decided not to change her decision in connection with this seesaw of departures.*<sup>13</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsami's high level of culture does not allow her to condemn anyone. Here equally is felt the Arab basis of trust in the fates of the heroes, trust in true feelings and in the truth of the personal viewpoint.

In the short story entitled '*Ashiq al-jidar* (The Lover of Walls)<sup>14</sup> she presents the image of the life of two Kuwaitis engaged during the occupation with painting anti-Iraqi slogans on walls. Their content always aroused the same reaction amongst the military patrols. Usually they were

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> The short story *Arjuha ar-rahil*, *op.cit.*, pp. 17–24.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> The short story '*Ashiq al-jidar*, *op.cit.*, pp. 25–30.

destroyed by a whole series of bullets fired at the wording, though it happened that they were directed against those who painted them who were unable to hide in time or who gave themselves away by being stained in red paint: *He recalled all the naked walls in the entire district. He decided to visit them so as to transfer his love to their hard brick. It is a love which he reasserts despite the flash of the bullets.*<sup>15</sup> However, the moment of enthusiasm on finding his own inscribed 'Kuwait for Kuwaitis' is awarded by sometimes hours of fear and the eradication from memory of the dark visions of the afflicted embracing the walls in fear:

He whispered silently: Jasim! My hand is covered in paint. Do you think they'll look at my fingers, and then an electric current will transform my body into a corpse? And all the marks of the paint will be baked by the butts of cigarettes. Jasim fell silent while Khalid ranted and imagined wild forms of torture: They'll play with my body before they embed it with a bullet of death. Then they'll imprint their fingers on my body. But my heart won't stop beating; it'll just beat stronger and louder so that it could betray me. The wild animal in their interior will start to tear off my paint splattered hand.<sup>16</sup>

In the short story *At-tabur* (The Queue)<sup>17</sup> published for the first time in the newspaper 'Sawt al-Kuwayt' in May 1992 we are dealing with a subsequent image of Kuwaiti social life during the Iraqi occupation. The War disorganised the regular supply of foodstuffs. The story is played out over the course of several hours which our heroine spends waiting for the yearned for – due to hungry children – bread:

She started to adjust her black abaya. She thought about her children, cups of tea, pieces of cheese and everyone who waited for the bread. She had been out of the house since morning. Now it was close on midday and she was still without bread.<sup>18</sup>

However, even arrival early morning still did not mean that you would become its lucky recipient. After many hours of standing almost daily a police or military patrol would arrive and take from the civilians the whole batch.

It also occurred that the bread would be taken by those favoured by the occupation. In the short story such a person is a prostitute who in an

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27–28.

<sup>17</sup> The short story *At-tabur*, *op.cit.*, pp. 31–38.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

open flirtation with an Iraqi officer takes the whole batch assigned that day to the shop:

The soldier grasped the woman and started in a whisper: Darling, how many loaves do you want? She replied flirtatiously playing with her button: A lot! I've got a big family. He embraced her even stronger and added: Just tell me how many you need? He bit her lower lip and she raised her black painted eyes and said: I need fifty loaves. The gun's muzzle was pointed in the direction of the baker. The soldier raised his voice and shouted: Eh! You, donkey! Did you hear what the lady said.<sup>19</sup>

The short story finishes with a brutal scene of the people in the queue being searched with the butt of the rifle, including our heroine. It refers as usual to whether they have hidden in their abayas – by some miracle of solidarity a secretly received – smuggled loaf of bread:

He indicated those who stood at the beginning of the queue and said in a severe ordering tone: Search them! Even the women in the abayas! Arrest anyone with bread! The fourth unit has been without bread now for two days! The soldiers are hungry! And then he added ironically: I have yet to see people eating when soldiers who are defending their country and honour go hungry.<sup>20</sup>

*Abwab mujannaha* (The Winged Doors)<sup>21</sup> is a short story that was printed for the first time in the newspaper 'Al-Watan' in December 1991 and is a shocking document of aggressive predatory actions carried out both systematically and in an indescribably irrational way. They were brutal actions destructive in character with the aim of completely destroying the fortune and value of human labour. Wrenched off doors, ripped open sofas, acts of vandalism carried out on plundered property long remain in the memory of the enormously moved reader:

They were on patrol, next to the house without doors and they started to plunder what remained in the houses. The dates on the palms raised their heads in shame so as not to look at the dismal interior. The sea turned its face in the direction of Khurum Shahr while the seagulls flew in search of food in the smouldering ruins of the burnt houses.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> The short story *Abwab mujannaha*, *op.cit.*, p. 39–43.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

The short story despite its saturation with brutal scenes and detailed descriptions of the degenerate acts of the destroyers '*is not contaminated*' however with evil. Thurayya's style is dramatic, yet we are able to say – as is befitting for every woman – that its internal power keeps up with the topic. So despite the fact that she conveys with unusual strength the drama it appears that she '*doesn't increase evil*' but is simply its witness – mourning and noting. In this short story Thurayya Al-Baqsmi makes use equally of irony for this is a splendid weapon in the description of the beastly actions of the greedy soldiers:

A senior officer took an enormous candelabra and ordered the soldiers to load it into an army truck. One of them, equal in rank said: Everything in the truck is yours. But the glass will be dust before it reached Baghdad. The officer then ordered his soldiers to crush it with their boots so that it smashed into little pieces.<sup>23</sup>

The title story *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles)<sup>24</sup> conveys a mood of uncertainty, unawareness of future fates as well as of the anguish of the hardships inflicted upon the inhabitants of bombarded Kuwait: *When the allied armies started their air war the inhabitants of Kuwait sought safety in the cellars. The word 'cellar' became a synonym for survival, escape to living graves, under the rubble of the houses which could be bombed.*<sup>25</sup> The heroine sitting in a darkened candle-lit cellar cries for hours on end agonising over her fate and that of her children. Through the chinks in the cellar door comes the sound of the ramshackled floor and the insistent demands of a man's voice demanding a car and other things of greater value. She survives a real tragedy when the soldiers drag her husband from the house and take him off in an unknown direction. She maintains, however, unusual reserve for such a situation in the face of blatant violence. Without curses, without pleading, or subjection, without a single word she undertook this difficult loneliness and care of defenceless children. Even being in the cellar did not suggest to her the heroism and dignity which emanates from the short story. When she leaves the cellar she does not instantly take in the joyous news of Kuwait's liberation:

She had never been a heroine, right to the day the soldiers dragged her husband from the house and threw him into a car which took him to an unknown fate. She

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup> The short story *Shumu' as-saradib*, *op.cit.*, pp. 45–51.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.



did not plead or do anything they could suspect. She held her children so tightly and stared at the shining stars on the officers' shoulders. This was the strength and right of the strong against the weak who left her alone in this damp cellar, nervously listening to the breathing of her young, the soldiers demanding cars, the whistle of bullets, the crack of artillery and other terrible sounds. The thought of waiting for death in such a way and in such conditions was in no way heroism.<sup>26</sup>

The short story *Kawma shawq* (A Heap of Thorns)<sup>27</sup> is the painful experiences of the wife of a Kuwaiti who is taken and whose fate remains unknown. May be he is imprisoned or may be he has been murdered in some barbaric way. The heroine is one of many waiting in hope: *Why did she sit on that rubble? Why her story was no different from that of other women... the wives of prisoners of war. The majority of women in the town bore the nickname 'wives of prisoners of war'.*<sup>28</sup> The heroine joined many Kuwaiti women who went hopefully and asked about their husbands, sons and fathers. They found solidarity together and supported each other in the most difficult moments:

For a week the camp of black abayas moved to the hospital, the police stations and foreign embassies. She was there always amongst them surrounded by other victims touched by the lack of information. She alternated between the excitement and the spasms of despair when hope unexpectedly was shattered.<sup>29</sup>

The short story *Atash Abu Sakhir* (The Thirst of Abu Sakhir)<sup>30</sup> deals with the image of the subsequent unhappiness brought by the war on the occupied country, though equally upon the occupiers. Men crammed into a prisoner of war camp are almost dying of thirst, for such a punishment inflicted voluntarily against them is considered to be an unwritten death sentence. The hero of the short story Muhammad tries to fight for his life and companion's by the catching of rain water in a rusty tin. He cannot, however, count on the co-operation of his fellow prisoners crammed together and equally driven mad by thirst, who fighting for every drop maim him with the tin used to collect water:

He held the tin can outside, in his strong hand, grasping it with amazing strength. He wished the can was bigger. But the narrow bars allowed for nothing bigger than

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

<sup>27</sup> The short story *Kawma shawq*, *op.cit.*, pp. 53–59.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>30</sup> The short story *Atash Abu Sakhir*, *op.cit.*, pp. 61–69.

this can. (...) They really appreciated what he was doing for them even though they had crowded at his chest and injured his arm with the sharp edge of the can in order to satisfy their thirst.<sup>51</sup>

In the end Muhammad, in not agreeing to a further situation of unpunished torment, demands to talk to the relevant Iraqi officer for the situation. He bravely tells of his wish that in the name of human rights the men should receive water – water from the nearby river. The call for water is taken to be unlawful and answered with the brutal decision of execution. But here the mysterious hand of fate changes the plans of degenerate human decisions. A subordinate refuses to carry out the order and when he is threatened with the same fate there is a timely visit from an officer from Baghdad. He quickly realises the damage caused by just such a treatment of prisoners of war in relation to the whole of war policy: *They finished after the officer from Baghdad: You son of a bitch! Do you want them to die of thirst just in order to avoid responsibility? Don't you know that you live in a country where individual decisions and plans do not exist?*<sup>52</sup> In this way Muhammad's brave deed saved his life and the lives of those that accompanied him.

The implication of the story is wide: on the one hand it is a damnation of the tragedy of fate in war, which brings suffering, hatred, degradation and disrupts social life for both sides. This is especially valid in relation to the death sentence, unlawfully carried out in a beastly frenzy often accidentally and often upon innocent victims. If there is no dignity in death then there is none in life. If there is no dignity in life then death is not terrible – which appears to be Muhammad's role. Despite the oppressive atmosphere of the story it has at its culminating point indications of the values of individual action and hope which always favours justice, and which is in fact present if – as in the story – luck accompanies it.

Finally in the last story entitled *Jamr az-zakira* (Rankling Resentment of Memory)<sup>53</sup> the hero suffers from a loss of memory from the moment of an accident that took place during the Iraqi occupation. But he does not experience the pain that would be his part in returning to a normal state of memory. He takes pills to aid his memory's return which has been so weakened yet enables him to carry out diplomatic duties: *He*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>53</sup> The short story *Jamr az-zakira*, *op.cit.*, pp. 71–81.

*delicately took the small, white tablet. He put it to his mouth and swallowed it down with water. The medical report said that he was suffering from a poor memory due to psychological tension brought about when he was a prisoner of war! The report added: The suffering and experience of the occupation had a great influence on weakening his memory.*<sup>54</sup> One day at a party to celebrate a national holiday he experiences a shock. He realised that it was exactly there, in that villa that the accident took place during an important meeting he was participating in. And that from that very villa – full of documents with information of false evidence, identities and radios – surrounded by a patrol, he had escaped. The shock returned his memory and the pain of those days: *One day he experiences a mighty shock. Which brought with it the painful world of sad recollections.*<sup>55</sup>

At the end of the short story the hero throws away in a meaningful gesture the box of tablets to aid memory. They are no longer necessary:

The car drove along the streets of Nuzha while he told stories one after another, revealing all the details hidden to date connected with the secret work during the invasion. Suddenly from the pocket of his 'dishdasha' he pulled out a packet of tablets to aid memory. He threw them through the window as they were no longer necessary. The shock was a sharp pain which returned his memory when he had thought it was already dead.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80–81.



# The Collection of Short Stories

## *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight)

Thurayya al-Baqsemi's collection of short stories *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight)<sup>1</sup> arose as the next act of embracing the dramatic events of Kuwait's recent history, through the memory and conscience of the writer. The collection was published in 1994 and contains 10 short stories. All of them deal with the subject of war: aggression, occupation, the resistance movement, the drama of the individual and the whole of society. These stories, on the whole short or even very short, portray the image of one or two characters against the backcloth of selected events and episodes from the life of the occupied country.

The first short story from this collection, entitled *Qalbuha al-akhdar* (Her Green Heart)<sup>2</sup> tells about a woman who is looking after a wounded man who is much younger than she is. It is melancholic and reflective in mood, while the cruelty of war is moved to a further plane in the face of the moods that result from the joint presence of individuals who fate connects because of the war. Forty-year-old unmarried Suad devotedly nurses a young soldier who dreams of getting better to be able to return to the battlefield. The intimacy of their being together and care gives rise in Suad to feelings of caring, as well as to others that are not:

She read the line on the palm for probably the tenth time. She was sad because she was unable to read her fate in these small and big lines. She squeezed her hand the harder to ensure herself of the feelings she felt towards this man who lay asleep next to her.<sup>3</sup>

Equally Yusuf, who has yet to turn twenty four, experiences similar feelings and starts to become more interested in the fate of his nurse:

<sup>1</sup> Thurayya al-Baqsemi, *Rahil an-nawafiz*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Kuwait 1994.

<sup>2</sup> The short story *Qalbuha al-akhdar* from the collection *Rahil an-nawafiz*, pp. 9–16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

If we are meant to be liberated from Iraqi occupation, and the country will be free then I will repay you for your goodness and care. There is in my family a sixty-year-old widower. His sons are already at university, and his daughters have got married. He is lonely, rich, and I think he would make a good husband for you.<sup>4</sup>

During the illness Suad often used to take Yusuf's hand, wanting to show him warmth and the safety her presence offered. At the same time she analysed the numerous lines on his hand prophesying him luck and happiness. However, his improved health brings with it a whole wave of more mundane and cruel reflections concerning her very self and her loneliness, as equally those eternally nurtured dreams of love:

She had looked at hundreds of cups, had prophesied from them people's happiness, she had predicted the future from the lines on many a palm. She had prophesied love, happiness, engagement, dreams when she herself was beyond it all. Why did that beautiful man fighting for his life not arouse in her maternal feelings? He is a real man, a hero. She was to get married but didn't. She sold dreams of happiness yet herself dreamt of a man.<sup>5</sup>

An additional accent in the work is tied to the character of 'Lolita' in European literature. It does not appear to be too appropriate, unless one exposes the common element of a difference in age: *Lolita is a woman-girl dreaming about a clever man-boy*.<sup>6</sup>

The short story *Rajul bila 'aynayn* (The Man without Eyes)<sup>7</sup> deals with the time of tension and war that a married couple went through. He is part of a distribution network of underground newsletters and for a long time does not arouse the suspicions of the occupiers. She, a writing artist, freely composes prose images not thinking of the content and the danger she places herself in. This short story is of interest not only because of the huge burden of visions and poetical images, but also because of the rarely present image for Arab literature of a supportive couple:

I yearn..., I yearn... I yearn for you so I paint my feelings and a green bird which builds its nest in the arms of the sea. The sea has become tired with this feeling, the braids lying in the arms of the Gulf. I miss ... and I paint my feelings. Heavenly, yellow stars squeeze the sky's eyebrows, decorating the forehead of the sea's fiancée with a fish's tail and a woman's heart. Feelings ruffle it, which means that

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> The short story *Rajul bila 'aynayn*, *op.cit.*, pp. 17–23.

I draw in the sand, on the seashore, your eyes which the wave washes. She discovered you were a man without eyes! She realised that she was a woman whose feelings know no limits. Your face is still visible in the sand, but without eyes for they were stolen by the sea nymphs. Your stolen eyes send out flashes from behind the grey clouds. The shine of your eyes rends the sky and shakes it, and then two stars fall on it searching for the eyes of the man which were engulfed by the sea's waves! A gypsy told me: "You will live long, and in your heart of heart's will blossom feelings for the man whose eyes were stolen by the sea nymph."<sup>8</sup>

In this short story we are dealing with an educated woman who is fulfilling herself creatively and who remains in strong linkage with the man she is closest to, who is the recipient of her creativity, a sensitive resonator and at the same time advisor in artistic matters. In the further part of the short story the action accumulates and takes on a dramatic pace. There takes place the arrest of the fellow conspirators in the resistance movement, and the husband of the heroine are equally detained. The whole composition is permeated by the vision of the man without eyes:

The bird fell on the arm of the sea forsaking the sea's fiancée in her anxiety and sadness. She feared the theft of his eyes. She knew that their cells are dark and do not let the sea in, and the birds of feelings die at the cell bars. That morning – before he was arrested – she had told him about her fear and anxiety. – Oh you! Terrible fate which accompanies me, I want you remain the man without eyes, reading me to sleep every night. I want to lie in your arms like the green bird lies in the arms of the sea.<sup>9</sup>

The short story *Kanat hiya ash-shahid* (She was a Witness)<sup>10</sup> is permeated with the painful mood connected with the war tragedy of the town and its individual inhabitants played out in the eyes of the author. The witness of all the atrocities is the town:

The town decided that it would finish with the smell of corpses, death and the soot of burnt rubbish. It jumped therefore from the barbed wire that surrounded it, which enclosed even the beach and was washed in the sea waves. The seagulls started to cry like madmen celebrating the town's liberation.<sup>11</sup>

The structure of the short story is the reams of white cloth given to the painter for her to turn her gaze away from the tragedy of the nation by oc-

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.

<sup>10</sup> The short story *Kanat hiya ash-shahid*, *op.cit.*, pp. 25–31.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

cupying herself with what brought her relief – painting. But this material was used to bury the dead: *She did not know how to act and whether to accept the present. Canvas for corpses? Was she to record on them testimonies of life or death?*<sup>12</sup> The heroine painted, but the pictures painted were unable to appease her suffering. The creative idea bore unexpected fruit bringing forth in images nightmarish visions: *of green alien faces similar to the faces of mummified pharaohs, of cold faces, green wrapped in white bandages with a tattooed date and unknown symbols.*<sup>13</sup> On the pavements there rested the unburied bodies of Kuwaitis so as to act as a warning to others: *They routinely signed death sentences. The order read: A sentence of death by shooting has been passed. Their naked bodies are to be left unburied as a warning to others.*<sup>14</sup> The heroine parts with this gift that belongs to the dead. There is, however, no echo of this in reality. Kuwaitis were buried only when the officer in charge was in a good mood, whose cruelty lessened upon learning that the stolen material had reached his family in Baghdad:

The bloody green bodies disappeared from the entrance to the shop complex after the officer had declared an amnesty for these corpses. This happened when he received news from his family that they had received the material sent.<sup>15</sup>

The short story *Da'irat al-basatir* (The Marks of Military Boots)<sup>16</sup> tells of the exceptionally brutal treatment of women in Iraqi gaols where they are tortured and beaten. They are left naked and condemned to a slow death without any rights of defence:

Even though she was a woman she looked frightening. Her breasts, stomach, long hair in no way attracted, they reminded one rather of a boy. She was constantly tortured regardless of her sex. The visits started off with her being surrounded by military boots, showered with obscenities and frightening laughter filled with wildness, and then there remained only the cement cold ground, which took the last of her warmth.<sup>17</sup>

The writing of one's date of death by the dying person belonged among the customs in force in this merciless prison. The heroine of the story

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26–28.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> The short story *Da'irat al-basatir*, *op.cit.*, pp. 33–38.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34–36.



– exhausted, yet an unyielding and once beautiful woman adds her name to the many names already there: *Her body shook with the cold even though she was already dead and cold. In waiting for death she raised her head in order to read the names on the wall: Suad 15-7-1964, Zuhur 20-8-1966, Halima 4-1-1972, Shihnaz 30-10-1983 and with a piece of coal she added Mashal 2-9-1990.*<sup>18</sup>

The short story *Suwar ma'akusa* (Inverted Images)<sup>19</sup> is composed of four images of which each is devoted to a different representation of the beginnings of the Iraqi aggression.

The first is the simultaneously lyrical and dramatic return of a husband from prison. Both he and she are hardly able to believe this happy fact. After many weeks spent in gaol where one can only sleep standing up an ordinary bath and sleep appear to be something dreamlike: *Just imagine that this bed was my dearest wish. There was not even space to sit down. There was only a dirty cement floor, and a space to sleep on was fought over by the prisoners. Everyone dreamt of sleep.*<sup>20</sup>

In the second image it is difficult for the heroine to part with her jewellery which she has to hide so that it does not fall prey to muggers. Despite her sentimental attachment to her jewellery the heroine decides finally not to hide anything. She considers that with everything in danger her jewellery is of no significance: *She walked around with the bag and when she was tired of looking for a secret place she undid the knot and started to put on the necklaces and earrings crying: – Let them steal me together with my dreams. Let them take them!*<sup>21</sup>

In the third image the very start of the war is shown. The image of the flag discarded by the occupier is repeated, along with the motif of the buying up of food by the population – as characteristic signs of the approaching occupation:

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait became fact, and the flag from the helicopter was proof of it. People started to buy up whatever they could in the shops. Again the car park in front of the shop swarmed in a forest of heads. The helicopter appeared every day and performed its trips with the flag. And people competed with each other in buying up goods in the shop. The police handed out weapons at

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>19</sup> The short story *Suwar ma'akusa*, *op.cit.*, pp. 39–45.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

the police station, which then turned into a prison for anyone who thought about putting a gun into his pocket.<sup>22</sup>

In the fourth and last image the heroine yearns simply to avoid meeting the signs of occupation. Yet she cannot escape from the sight of the occupied fatherland, or from being party to the violence of the military apparatus. The tank she meets frightens her to her very core:

She was taken aback. On the asphalt tongue she saw an enormous machine. It was a tank with a huge gun barrel moving on caterpillar tracks. Oh! My God! It's a tank! But why is it travelling against the traffic? It is because the image is inverted. The tank moved along the asphalt. It destroyed the road making holes in it.<sup>23</sup>

In the short story *Thuqub fi az-zakira* (Gaps in Memory)<sup>24</sup> an episode from the war period is described whereby the fate of a man is decided on by a game of roulette. This roulette decided on the destruction of painting output as well as the life of a young doctor who was brave enough to film the acts of aggression on the part of the Iraqis – the burning of the secret police building. Equally death as survival depended on the whims and mechanical pointer of this brutal game of gambling, in which another man does not have an equal right to exist and is not deserving of respect:

They blindfolded him and placed a pistol to his head, the trigger was pulled. Click! Click! It didn't fire. A wild laugh filled the air. One of the soldiers said: God, it's stupid this Russian roulette. Death turns in the gun-magazine, and one's heart stops beating out of fear. But you don't die, because they have yet to decide about your death.<sup>25</sup>

The title story *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight)<sup>26</sup> differs from the remaining stories through its recallable – reflective – emotional mood. Admittedly it describes war, but the heroine spends many hours in the window stuck with sticky tape which is supposed to neutralise the effects of the events of the war waiting for her beloved. The beginning of the story is filled with recollections of the first love from childhood. The linkage between the parts of the work is also love and those self same emotions

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>24</sup> The short story *Thuqub fi az-zakira*, *op.cit.*, pp. 47–51.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>26</sup> The short story *Rahil an-nawafiz*, *op.cit.*, pp. 53–58.

of expectation as once existed even though they were directed towards different people and existed in a different time period:

Today she is living new experiences in old frames. The window returns again, but accompanies her as shadow. But she has changed. The pane is stuck with sticky tape, which means former danger.<sup>27</sup>

The story finishes with the return of the man and talks of love, which are stylistically characteristic for Thurayya Al-Baqsamī.

In the story *Al-'ajz al-abyad* (The White Infirmary)<sup>28</sup> we come across a written portrait which experiences the occupation of Kuwait in a complex way. The war danger paralyses her abilities and will to write. The words do not come, while the few articles that appear in the press are anonymous. Everyone who becomes involved in the press and its distribution is instantly shot. People were not frightened however, and underground commemorative literature developed rapidly that accused the invader and his fascist regime:

Even though she knew about her languor this encouraged her to write words for the front pages of secret newspapers, which would fight with the tanks like the words written on the walls of schools. Soldiers at checkpoints searched for weapons and secret newspapers. If they find them under the seat or in the car then they are always immediately sentenced to death. They do not feel, however, a fear of hanging.<sup>29</sup>

The heroine is chiefly involved in writing on walls to mobilise the people to fight for freedom: *She touches the ceiling with a gaze full of anxiety. She sighs and starts to scribble with a pen. The piece of paper is covered in scribbles. She shuts her eyes. She wanted to be strong enough to write on the school wall: No to the Occupation! Leave Kuwait free and independent!*<sup>30</sup>

The short story *'Amu Khalifa* (Amu Khalifa)<sup>31</sup> is the most tragic and even brutal of the whole collection. The hero is no longer a working creative woman, the beloved life companion, but Amu Khalifa – an already old civil servant who despite the danger returns to the already devastated

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>28</sup> The short story *Al-'ajz al-abyad*, *op.cit.*, pp. 59–64.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>31</sup> The short story *'Amu Khalifa*, *op.cit.*, pp. 65–73.

department building which is now occupied by foreign forces to collect documents, photos, and notes :

All night Amu Khalifa recalled the contents of his desk. He was anxious that someone might rummage in his things. There were after all so many personal things there: notebooks with his poems, a book on contemporary literature, letters from his son Hisham – a medical student in Germany, photos of the granddaughter Mirfat and the three little devils – his daughter Jihan's sons. There was the family album which he showed his colleagues so they could get to know members of his family.<sup>32</sup>

The naivety of the hero leads to his death. In being unable to decide and quickly deal with his affairs he brings upon himself an attack of aggression and perishes in a brutal way: *His cries and running annoyed the soldier who stood up from behind a bag of cement and hit him hard, then he kicked and struck him with the gun in the chest. It was only then that Amu Khalifa knew real pain and had a heart attack, which took away his soul.*<sup>33</sup> The story ends on an unheard of cynical note – the lie of the soldier justifying himself before his commander: *Sir, the old man was an enemy and agent distributing secret documents before the gates of the ministry so I had to kill him. I only hit him gently and his frail body just could not take it.*<sup>34</sup> The gloomy mood of the short story is comparable to the tragedy and thinking of the great painter Goya in his series of etchings *The Disasters of War*.

The last short story *Ashjar Ba'aquba* (The Ba'aquba Trees)<sup>35</sup> is devoted to the prisoners of war arrested during the first days of the war and who by a miracle were saved and visited by family. There dominates here an atmosphere of sorrow and tears which are shed by the lonely heroine on seeing the magnitude of the experienced suffering:

When I got to the place I discovered that it was a stadium where all the prisoners had been gathered. I started to move freely. I became lost in the crowd. In that sea of sorrow I was alone without anyone close. Someone who would help me tolerate the loneliness. I therefore started to cry on the breast of one of the Kuwaiti prisoners of war.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>35</sup> The short story *Ashjar Ba'aquba*, *op.cit.*, pp. 75–79.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

The style of the prose formulation is natural, of a freely developing form in relation to the image presented. It is the mixing of a presentation of subjects in the form of monologue, dialogue and synthetic-symbolic action in the overwhelming images of the war drama. In these latter ones the form of visualising narration is often used *based on the present tense used in the function of the past*.<sup>37</sup> In certain the type of informative short story dominates. A very important role in the stories is fulfilled by the dynamic description, harmonising with the tempo and range of the development of events being also a typical feature of Thurayya's affiliation to modern creativity. As far as the form of utterance goes there prevails the third person of reported speech where the narrator reports the thoughts of individuals and state of events contrastively intertwined either with a monologue or dialogue. The focal point and the culminating point on the whole agree with the dramatic action or process of increasing internal dramatic experience and fall to the end of each of these miniature prosaic forms. In a short story composed of several images, as for example – *Suwar ma'akusa* (Inverted Images) – the increasing dramatics is to be found at the end of each of them.

Despite the extremely dramatic nature of the prose there remains a lot of room in it for the expression of feelings, metaphors, and even poetic attempts at the characterisation of difficult feelings to conceptualise – yearning, anxiety, love and despair. The image of the occupation and the armed attack in this collection is depicted in a wide range of events and hues. Sometimes only in a fragmentary description or some snip of dialogue or monologue. Details are, however, clearly drawn, sometimes even in a documentary light.

In the short story *Suwar ma'akusa* (Inverted Images) the start of the occupation is presented together with the increasing threat of the initial indications of foreign rule. The short stories *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight) and *Al-'ajz al-abyad* (The White Infirmary) depict the difficult conditions of the constant threat to physical and spiritual life during the period of the state's occupation. The remaining contains numerous scenes from the life of a society encompassed by the war and the tragic experiences of the individuals themselves. An example of which is the short story *Da'irat al-basatir* (The Marks of Military Boots). Fear, worry

<sup>37</sup> M. Głowiński, A. Okopień-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, *Zarys teorii literatury*, Warszawa 1986, (5<sup>th</sup> edition), p. 336.

about one's nearest and dearest, the necessity of giving an expression of resistance in the face of the cruelty that is accompanying the increasing introduction of new acts of unrestrained police and military terror, imprisonment and the flouting of all human rights is presented to the reader of the short story *'Amu Khalifa* (Amu Khalifa).

In the short stories from this collection although visualising narration dominates, the weight of the author's personal experience from this period is detectable – accompanying like a shadow. This remains closely connected with the permanent autobiographical feature of the short stories. The author herself as a tragic and conscious witness of what happens hides more or less visibly in the fictional background. In at least a half of the short stories from the collection *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight) there appears an artistically talented literary hero-woman,<sup>58</sup> in whom everyone sees the author herself and her authentic, dramatic experiences from this period. As such the character experiences the personal drama – besides the general and temporary threat to his life and that of his nearest and dearest, or also the danger of the very act of writing, which for everyone, as evidence of resistance, meant the death sentence. This is borne out by the inability to create as a result of the paralysis of all feelings e.g. in *Al-'ajz al-abyad* (White Infirmary), or the experience gained by the destruction of paintings through the occupier's degenerative vandalism, for instance in *Thuqub fi az-zakira* (Gaps in Memory). Personal features are also discovered by the reader in fairly numerous dialogues and descriptive scenes of woman and man united by permanent, friendly, creative and supportive feelings in the short story *Rajul bila 'aynayn* (The Man without Eyes). This undoubtedly characterises the happiness of the author's personal life. A life which has given her an outstanding possibility to freely express herself, and this possibility Thurayya Al-Baqsamī has not overlooked. Despite her fine arts education she has made the effort to provide a written testimony of that time. Possibly believing like Sartre that *the mission of literature cannot be replaced by any form of social involvement, that a certain type of truth is achievable exclusively in literary creativity*.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Thurayya al-Baqsamī, short stories: *Rajul bila 'aynayn*, *Kanat hiya ash-shahid*, *Suwar ma'akusa*, *Thuqub fi az-zakira*, *Al-'ajz al-abyad*, op.cit.

<sup>59</sup> J. Brzozowski, *Francuzi po śmierci Sartra*, Kraków 1981.

The remaining characters of the stories are individuals who are touched in various ways by the acts of war and are confronted repeatedly by extreme acts of cruelty and beastliness, which are born out of every war, and especially the case in a war which is nameless. The nameless manifestation of extermination, which was forecast by a flock of crying seagulls. In several stories this apocalyptic tone hides in the dialogues and painfully rounded action. The most extremely documented case in this collection is that of the prison torment of women associating itself with similar events during the Second World War in Europe.

Thurayya Al-Baqsamī's artistic imagination has an important influence on the style and contents of her short stories. This is evident in the colourfully synthetic and lively hold on image and the sense of what happens characterised often by only a single detail separated by contrast from the background, concentrating and developing the imagination, for instance in the short story *Thuqub fi az-zakira* (Gaps in Memory). In this way the whole tension and experience of the sentence is concentrated: *The white canvas was holed by the pistol shots.*<sup>40</sup> The sentence in a way quicker than a long description animates the reader's reaction and makes clear the whole drama of aggression, which spares neither people nor art, nor anything from peacetime.

Thurayya Al-Baqsamī's style – even in the presentation of the saddest moments of the events that took place then – is permeated with the great richness of images suggested by the imagination. A single telling formulation overtakes another which only then form together a harmonious composition full of dramatic details. The author does not however allow us to be possessed by the background, the specific interpretation and huge will to oppose the tragic events. This is an outstanding feature of Thurayya's writing, who together with her huge sense of culture, her ability to see and use a metaphorical image, creates from her writing an original creativity of a distinct and unique character. It is a form of creativity priceless in difficult times when nobody wants to remember either about the bad dealt out to him, and even less about the bad lurching in him himself. This is the ability of a just, for it is not increased by its own attitude of aggression, indication of the true and rich face of humanitarian judgement. Such a face supported by an active imagination is the only guarantee of memory so as not to turn one's back on human fate.

<sup>40</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Thuqub fi az-zakira*, op.cit., p. 48.

Another feature of Thurayya's writing – her wide use of symbols – is connected with the details that attract attention in an artistic way. Symbols in her works, besides the attire of the images also act poetically and are especially often used in lyrical constructions. This is particularly evident in the title story *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight), where beside the real windows – which stuck over with sticky tape one does not know whether they can guarantee protection for the civilian population for long – the dynamic motif of the narration takes place. The window – the eternal symbol on the border of meanings of our safe haven, while being in contact with the world – turned inwards and open to the outside in a concise way, yet at the same time poetical – and integral proving the entry of poetry into our lives – it affects the imagination through the memory of the past, the present state and extending into the future showing the threads of leading experiences: the love, fear, care, and threat of the family under occupation.

In the short story *Rajul bila 'aynayn* (The Man without Eyes) the symbolism of the eyes is used in a subtle way and enters easily into the poetical-literary imagination. It is a true masterpiece of creation equally in the fabric of narration – in order that the tragedy of the possible loss of eyes in the man was obvious, as in order not to paralyse the courage of existence which in the face of such cruelty renounces its very self. At the same time here is shown 'from the inside' the creative state of man, who with his great vision is dauntless in nobleness and dignity, even in the face of extreme threats. It is simultaneously one of the elements of her personal message and of the answer which is integrally contained in her writing. This is neatly put in Thurayya's own words: *I wanted to say in this collection that human feelings never are extinguished, even in war time. People still dream and yearn to fulfil those dreams.*<sup>41</sup> And the reader can also add that not only are feelings not extinguished but also the ability brought with the art of communing with such an extreme threat like war, through which the ability of the real art of hope is not the greater evil, constantly reveal the roots of goodness and beauty as the potential fatherland of peace.

<sup>41</sup> On the basis of an interview conducted by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Thurayya al-Baqṣami on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1995.



# Muzakkirat Fattuma al-kuwaytiyya as-saghira (Recollections of a Small Kuwaiti Fattuma)

*Muzakkirat Fattuma al-kuwaytiyya as-saghira* (Recollections of a Small Kuwaiti Fattuma) published in 1992 deals with the period of armed aggression against Kuwait – from the first day, i.e. 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 1992 to the last day, which was the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 1991 – as seen through the eyes of a child. Fattuma, Thurayya's then nine-year-old daughter notes down her recollections with her mother's help and illustrates them with own illustrations.

This text increases in world literature the genre of children's confessions collected in the form of prose, the foremost example of which in Europe is Anne Frank's *Diary*. The war experiences of children are always the greatest violation of their rights and undeserved wrong, the traces of which are usually felt through their whole life. *They will not be children, but they are already people*<sup>1</sup> – wrote Janusz Korczak, the great friend of children and defender of their rights: *They deserve a third of the produce and riches of the earth – out of right and not charity. The fruits of a third of the victories of human thought are theirs*<sup>2</sup> – he wrote demanding equal rights for children in relation to adults and their protection in the face of cruel reality. Relating to the last cited thought Fattuma's diary seems to be such a victory of thought. Returning once more to Korczak's thinking from the reading of *Muzakkirat Fattuma al-kuwaytiyya as-saghira* (Recollections of a Small Kuwaiti Fattuma) strikes the certainty of the truth in his superb identification of the human relation of generations, which he had already concluded in the ghetto in addressing children in the orphanage: *And this is the truth that everyone ought to understand and remember well: we are bringing you up, but you are also bringing us up.*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ryszard Waksmund, *Stulecie dziecka*, "Odra" 1995, Nr 6, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Janusz Korczak, *Trzeba to zrozumieć*, in: *Janusz Korczak w getcie. Nowe Źródła*, Warszawa 1992.

The recollections of a small girl moderately and nobly develop and shake her childish maturity. For a child of that age her child's hand from a great distance reflects the pain and fear of experiences outlined:

From the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August life in my town became strange and intolerable. All the motorways and roads were full of tanks, military trucks, the army filling every space, heavy weapons. All of this seized the town and increased the strange, sad feelings. With the course of the days the sound of guns became common, but it still did not stop me from being anxious. My bed shook so I ran to my parents', knocked on the door of their bedroom and no sooner had mummy opened the door then I jumped into her arms embracing her. Tears flowed down her cheeks: Mummy I'm frightened!<sup>4</sup>

The whole text radiates a deep sorrow, the sorrow and worry of the subsequent days experienced. Together with Fattuma we get to know the reality of life for Kuwaiti citizens during those days. The reality of war appears gradually laying its subsequent black marks on the colourful world of a child. Together with the heroine the reader experiences the filling of the motorway and roads with tanks and military trucks. The initially accidental shooting soon becomes a daily matter. In the same way that common becomes saying farewell to a departing family, the dramas of street executions and the constant moves:

Today granny kissed me and hugged me tight in farewell. She spoke with tears in her eyes: – May God keep you safe. In front of my eyes there passed a caravan of cars in which were members of mother's family. I embraced in farewell my friends, my aunt's daughters not believing that we would part. They decided to leave when life became difficult and dangerous, particularly after the raid by Iraqi soldiers on granny's house and the taking prisoner of Uncle Yusuf. The soldiers searched granny's house three times and it was then that the family decided to leave, out of fear of imprisonment.<sup>5</sup>

Together with the increasing number of days under occupation house searches become more common with the aim of finding evidence of participation in the outlawed resistance movement, together with which grows the threat to Fattuma's family life, particularly as father was deeply involved in the resistance movement: *I will never forget as long as I live the noise when the Iraqi soldiers hammered on the door of our house, and daddy*

<sup>4</sup> Thurayya Al-Baq sami, *Muzakkirat Fattuma al-Kuwaytiyya as-saghira*, 10<sup>th</sup> August 1990.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1990.

*didn't want to open it for them, for he knew that they had started to systematically realise the plan to murder as many Kuwaiti men as possible. They took them from homes, mosques, streets. Only when they wanted to smash down the gate did father ask me to hide under the bed and not to come out. Then he opened the door. The noise abated. I cried seeing how they took daddy and the father of my friend Hanan, and Salwa's brother and another four sons of our neighbour Umm Adam. When mummy returned from the bazaar she found me alone without daddy.*<sup>6</sup>

Fattuma spends the whole time at home, yearning for a free life and even for her school from where Iraqi soldiers had taken all the equipment and musical instruments: *They had stolen our sun, our sea, our school, our chairs and blackboards which subsequently hung on the walls of their schools with a portrait of their leader. I had always wished before this for something to happen in our school so that the door would be locked and we could rest from learning. Now however I really miss it and feel deep sorrow.*<sup>7</sup> Fattuma, not being able to watch television which all the time broadcast war programmes, occupies herself with drawing. Her mother is, however, troubled when spontaneously she paints 'green lizards' as she calls the Iraqi soldiers, having the heads of different animals and not arousing the sympathy of the enemy in time of a search: *I forgot to mention that I loved to draw and that luckily there was lots of paper and coloured pencils at home. And when I felt frightened or bored I sought protection in a chair surrounded by pictures which shocked my mother. She hid them in a place I don't know of and said: Don't you know Fattuma that the soldiers are searching Kuwaiti homes. You only add to our problems by painting soldiers in the stupid shapes of monkeys and dogs. If they find those pictures they'll show no mercy towards your life.*<sup>8</sup> Is it a coincidence that these creatures, conjured up by the child's imagination, remind one of Egyptian and ancient creatures. And the 'green lizards'? Are they not linked subconsciously with the unpunished trend popular at present of going back into the past of the earth, which could be dangerous after all.

The style of the diary in various instances recalls contemporary fashionable prose in its conciseness, compactness, simplicity, limitation yet in the frank style and wording of a child. Fattuma's diary exudes boundless

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1991.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1991.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 16<sup>th</sup> August 1990.

sincerity, naivety and an internal greatness unblemished by what has been experienced by adults. The child's view is on the whole as yet uncorrupted by the branding of adult life and its account is the truest.

That morning I ate breakfast in silence. My father appeared unexpectedly, who walked around the whole house with a radio pressed to his ear. His facial expression was one of worry – “pulsating like an aubergine seed” as father would say. Today's a weekday and yet he hasn't gone to work, which is not like him. I wanted to solve the mystery so I asked: Daddy, why haven't you gone to work today? Have you lost the car keys? Or may be you just don't want to? He answered in a sad voice looking at me: I've lost something great and valuable. I've lost my homeland! I understood nothing of this. I was unable to comprehend how someone could lose their country.<sup>9</sup>

One can admire the bravery of the small girl who even upon seeing her small beloved teddy ripped open by a soldier remains silent. Fear does not paralyse her evaluation of the situation:

They didn't even spare my room. They threw the toys about, and one of the soldiers speared his gun into the stomach of my teddy. He opened up his stomach looking for weapons inside. I was shocked and hid behind daddy. I looked at them through half shut eyes.<sup>10</sup>

Visible is also the typical feature of a child drawing attention away from all the ghastliness to the direction of life which if only a little – even in the most terrible of moments – recalls the giving of joy and dreams. Such a moment for Fattuma is the baking of bread, something she becomes with time a little expert at:

After several days of baking, the neighbours' children called Fattuma the baker. My bread was of various shapes: in the shape of stars, flowers, and the sun. The children came in order to get a piece, and some even helped. Baking bread became my favourite game, and then eating it and being satiated.<sup>11</sup>

The child's world disturbed by war and its atrocities appears to condemn the whole of adult society which defiled itself through the degradation of man and his dignity. Besides – under the occupant – dignity and life are decided upon for the child by insignificant things like for instance an ordinary bar of chocolate, thanks to which the child and its mother are

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1990.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1990.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1990.

free. Fattuma without a word of complaint or a second of hesitation hands over the chocolate, yet there remains in her a conviction expressed in the words: *How cheap man is, if his life is only worth a bar of chocolate!*<sup>12</sup> Together with Fattuma the reader is witness to the increasing bombardments and change of play: hope and fear in the child, who would like to associate the red light in the sky with fireworks than the flying of bomber planes:

The air attacks started and the liberation of Kuwait. They were so loud and dangerous that we had to hide in the cellar. Mother said: – The cellar has saved us from death when the bomb fell on our house. I hid in the cellar because I suspected that only cellars could sustain the bombing. The door to the cellar shook as if it was to go flying. I was paralysed with fear. At night I liked to be in the cellar because I could watch the red lights which appeared in the sky. It looked like a line of shooting stars which our teacher had told us about during the class. Daddy said that the lights were not in celebration but signified danger. He said that if I wasn't in the cellar some harm could come to me.<sup>13</sup>

Through the eyes of a child we become acquainted with Baghdad and the prisoner-of-war camp Ba'aquba:

I will never forget visiting the prisoner-of-war camp at Ba'aquba. Mummy cried a lot on seeing uncle as a prisoner of war. I was struck by the picture of the prisoners of war and their families. I was preyed upon by strange feelings I am unable to describe.<sup>14</sup>

The reader is able to experience with Fattuma the true joy upon the ceasing of hostilities, the ending of a war that suddenly broke out and suddenly ceased. A war, which penetrated with absurdity and the hopelessness all the rational bases of the humanistic thought of many people, not only Kuwaitis. The war watched on the television screens of the entire world was played out as if it was a war film series. It was to destroy, take life and destroy peace for many a month. This cannot be justified. Liberation, like the invasion, came at night taking by surprise our small heroine:

I slept deeply tightly cuddling teddy, which mummy had sewn up after the green lizards had opened up its stomach. Suddenly mummy stroked me saying joyously: – Get up Fattuma! The nightmare is over and Kuwait is liberated! I looked at her with sleepy eyes and asked: Will daddy come back? Mummy lifted me up and cuddled me lovingly, saying: Fattuma! My little one! Kuwait is liberated! Our

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 10<sup>th</sup> January 1991.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1991.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1990.

fatherland has been returned to us! I left the cellar not believing in what mummy had said. I saw on the streets the neighbours' dancing children. People went on to the roofs. The street filled with crowds full of joy. There was not a single trace of the green lizards which had left, never to return.<sup>15</sup>

In reading *Muzakkirat Fattuma al-kuwaytiyya as-saghira* (Recollections of a Small Kuwaiti Fattuma) we get to know, through the eyes of a child, the war from the perspective it is viewed by innocent children. They get to know in these extreme circumstances what fate and another person can be.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1991.

# Literary Characters in Thurayya Al-Baqsemi's Short Stories

In taking into consideration the diversity of motives within the construction of literary figures that feature in the short stories of Thurayya Al-Baqsemi, together with the composite characteristic traits, the grouping of religious, social or even metaphysical motivations, the functioning of the main figures can be divided into four types. The first is the hero of traditional Kuwaiti society based partly on the old system of values and defined by a traditional way of life. The second is the hero of the modern society where the norms and conditions of life are to a greater degree connected to European ones, and are linked to the whole complexity of problems and dilemmas characteristic for the post-modernist era. The third is the hero of the period of the Iraqi-Kuwaiti conflict who is subordinated chronologically to the temporal-spatial events of the aggression, occupation and war of liberation, as well as the final fourth hero who is at the same time as if an element of one of the three remaining, yet who based both on the former style of life and the modern represents autobiographical features of the life of Thurayya herself and her family.

The main figures in Thurayya Al-Baqsemi's short stories remain in so to say chronological accord with the development of her writing consciousness. Feeling her calling as a writer she avidly listened to her family's stories, diligently noting them down and elaborating with her own impressions. From these transfers there derive numerous autobiographical details which are richly scattered in the short stories. Along with her own development Thurayya widens the spectrum of her own observations while at the same time deepening her own field of viewing reality which with age gives a sharper expression to the presentation of the world.

The main literary characters in the short stories achieve consciousness of their situation and either revolt or seek at least within the limits of their reality a genuine dignity in existence. In the worst instance they do not agree with the situation and attempt to consciously equal it, not losing it from sight like a threatening dragon which although it threatens does not disturb really the structure of humanity. The threats visible in the short

stories are numerous. Some derive from the traditional and already decidedly unmatched norms to contemporary human ideals. Others, including chance-war ones are the non-silent echoes of the human drama from the period of aggression, occupation and war of liberation. Finally the problems of a completely emancipated consciousness are drawn which overcomes the barrier of sex, yet stands before it as an individualised problem of the means of life activity: who can be an artist? What is the price and final reason? What is the status of an artist to be when taking into account the contemporary tasks of society?

The hero of the short stories, on a subject matter taken from a life still organised in a traditional way, with roots extending into the old world of norms and conceptions, is recruited from various social layers. For it is there that the social drama of individuals displays its faces of threat, irony and languor. In this relation the range of problems touches like everywhere in the world the contrast of the poor and rich, of those whose fate is determined by events beyond their control and circumstances, as well as those whose actions and decisions determine the course of events. It is difficult to say whether in a way similar to the pair of opposites good and evil humanity will ever deal with this shadow that accompanies human existence – the shadow of a polarised earth. There weighs upon the fates of heroes of this type of short stories a more or less visible problem of discrimination of sex, as well as of the still widespread role and interference of parents in the lives of children. This type of main character for short stories is to be found chiefly in two collections *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat) and *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree).

In the collection *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat) the individual characters represent on the whole still the view points of children or young teenagers, and the way of behaving in the Arab world as seen through the eyes of girls, as for instance in the short stories *Ad-dumya* (The Doll) or *'Arus al-qamar* (Fiancée like the Moon), and boys as in the short stories *Al-mulabbas* (The Sweet) and *Al-mulla* (The Teacher). A certain type of collective hero representing the young generation is also the group of children in the short story *Umm Adam* (Adam's Mother). They are short stories whose main characters possess little in the way of life experience, yet who are already entangled in the clearly defined mechanisms of division, command and the accustomed norms of affiliation to an adult world. They are the best able to reflect this reality, the image of which often undergoes obliteration during adolescence. This reality is still full of the old superstitions and demonic images like in the short story *Umm Adam*



(Adam's Mother), or full of the richness of imagination and mysterious charms in the sensing of the world and its irrevocable destinies. Such is the short story *Yā al-mashmum* (Musk) which, despite the sharply drawn drama of the social non-adaptation of young people in love, advances, however, praise of love which is as if often and vainly searched out in the most liberated social conditions. Numerous autobiographical references are scattered in all the short stories from the collection *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat). One may find them even in the sketch of the sweet seller, which is a sweet reminiscence from the life of the author's family. The initial model for the hero of the story is after all her father presented against the back cloth of daily life in Kuwait and the situations experienced by people at this time, where all divisions were strengthened by the belonging to religious groupings, the Sunni and Shia, the town Arabs or the Bedouins. The heroine of the short story *Umm Adam* (Adam's Mother) from the same collection lived, as Thurayya mentions, in the same district as her father.<sup>1</sup> The short story *Al-mulabbas* (The Sweet) is again connected with the life of Thurayya's father and presents a fragment from his childhood – the life of a boy who has to work when his father dies and leaves him with a widow and five children to keep.

The second collection of short stories published in 1988, entitled *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree), concentrates on the problem area of the social and psychological situation of women, partly left to old conditions and partly already coming out into the new ways of feeling and thinking about oneself. To this traditional world belong the characters that represent the members of a certain family exhibited in the title short story *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree). The magical and notional elements accompany the strong determinations for the social being of traditional society, which on the one hand is deep fatalism, while on the other soothe and contribute elements of poetic beauty into a short story brutal in turns. The difficult situation of the unequal position of women is presented by the short stories *Al-katf* (The Arm) and *As-saf'a* (The Blow). Within these women, despite the fact that they have grown up since childhood in the conviction that their fate is of no consequence and that it is strictly conditioned and dependant upon the male part of society, rise however to revolt and there slowly grows a revolutionary conviction about the need to change their situation.

<sup>1</sup> On the basis of an interview carried out with Thurayya al-Baqsemi in Kuwait 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1994.

The heroine of the short story *Buq'at lawn* (The Colourful Stain) who represents the achievement of complete independence and the possibility of earning one's own income, ordering oneself, free movement in one's own vehicle can be considered to belong to modern society. In this short story one can analyse the new situation of a woman who has been liberated from her traditional roles, while at the same time possibly fulfilled, she stands before the problem of an artistic calling which is a demanding and dangerous partner for every life. Sometimes she demands radical cuts, and thrusts her verdict on the isolation and articulation of importance which does not allow for the use of a distinguished position. It appears that the author in this veiled way exposes here certain anxieties that prey on her herself. As the author herself notes, this is a short story about Thurayya as an artist who has to work and she dreamt always about having time just for art.<sup>2</sup>

In the short story *Al-hafafish* (The Bats) from the same collection of short stories there are presented the fates of a young couple of lovers who are already conscious of the new realities of life, although as yet not free enough to be able to enjoy the blossoming of their unpolluted feelings, yet are left to the mercy or rather lack of mercy of the sturdy blacks of the old conditions. There partly belong to this group the characters of short stories who represent the new income and political reality – as is the case in the short story *Al-fazi'a* (The Alarm) from the collection *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat) or *Ad-dyfa* (The Frog) from the collection *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree). In them appear the new attitudes of solidarity and threat at the same time the norm resulting from the possible circumstances of the sources of profit and influence of the prospect of enrichment on the attitude of the individual. Here also are characters belonging to the educated spheres of certain war stories. For in war narration one can show numerous features and traits of new attitudes fully based on the universal attitudes of world culture. One of the examples of this new motivation in the heroes' attitudes can be found in the short story *Al-'ajz al-abyad* (The White Infirmity) from the collection entitled *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight) published in 1994 where the heroine betrays her own situation as something untypical for an Arab woman:

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

She loved to fly in a plane and it was her favourite place for writing, flying in the white clouds. Her sheet of paper was whiter than the clouds and she made notes on them and the whiteness disappeared under the constant writing of the pen.<sup>5</sup>

The problem of the paralysed possibility to create brought about by the war is already a symptom of a more different and unusual consciousness that does not belong to a designated sex or social position. There is also the noted existence of the new intellectual – universal human attitude, to a degree even eminently privileged by fate, on the ashen remains caused by historical conflagration of a violently departing system from the scene.

The main figures in the war short stories from the collection *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight) come from various social backgrounds. The heroine of the short story *Qalbuha al-akhdar* (Her Green Heart) belongs still to the world of traditional values. She comes from a family which negatively decided about the fate of their beloved daughter, preferring to leave her unmarried than have her marry someone considered unsuitable by the family. The war however shakes up, for a time at least, all matters connected with birth. In treating a wounded soldier Suad becomes a heroine transcending the stigma of her fate and the isolation of the social caste system. Through her care she again becomes beautiful, full of dreams and through this liberated from the fetters of the past.

In the short story *Rajul bila 'aynayn* (The Man without Eyes), which is unusually stamped with autobiographical traits, and taken from the same collection, the heroine and her husband, who accompanies her, belong to the Kuwaiti intelligentsia. Their relations are as partners not only in the personal respect, but also equally creatively. The heroine presented her creative work to her husband and he constitutes for her a trusted mentor and friend. This is an unusual relationship both in Europe and Asia, but the war enters into everything and the heroine is no longer within her beloved world of letters but experiences along with everyone else the spasms of fear over the arrest of her husband, like every threatened citizen of Kuwait. What remains for her as a link with that totally safe world brimming with sense and purpose is her imagination which soothes the cruelty of the world around.

The main characters in the short story *Thuqub fi az-zakira* (Gaps in Memory) from the collection *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight) are

<sup>5</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsemi, *Al-'ajz al-abyad* from the collection *Rahil an-nawafiz*, Kuwait 1994, p. 62.

a painter and a doctor. It is not the characteristics of their professions that are important, however, but the sudden submersion within dramatic war situations. The painter stands in front of real and symbolic bullet-riddled images, the doctor in turn often harassed to death, plays Russian roulette and finally is forced to treat the enemy.

The main literary figures of the short stories are on the whole adult citizens of Kuwait. They actively take part in the nightmare of life during the aggression of the war and occupation. They are deprived of their loved ones, suffer because of their loss, actively protest against the cruelty around and fight with the invader, yet they are themselves subjected to imprisonment, torture and shameful isolation as is the case in the short story *Atash Abu Sakhir* (The Thirst of Abu Sakhir) from the collection *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles).

As has already been said the war levelled out social inequalities. Despite the fact that many left the country – as in the short story *Arjuha ar-rahil* (The Seesaw of Departure) from the collection *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles) many still remained, and together with them their loyal partners and families. The heroes of the war short stories as a rule are not passive in the face of events, with the exception of a few female characters as with the one from *Zaman al-inhidar* (Time of Decline) who in a totally passive way remains behind the doors of her flat in a state of depression and languor. Yet there is aroused in her a desire to participate in the resistance movement following a visit to a friend's. The characters presented by Thurayya find themselves often in extremely threatening situations which they resist with great personal dignity. They do not display fear even in the face of a direct threat to them, they are prepared to preserve the personal pride of the Arab knight of the desert. Yet the suggestiveness of the short stories is primarily the advancement of the conviction that the chances of the individual are increasingly diminishing against the collective acts of violence which avalanche-like cover the common sources of human hopes.

The autobiographical feature, so characteristic for the stories, penetrates all the stages of the war stories. This is most clearly presented in the characters of women, of whom many are educated and are taken by surprise in full creative activity by the war which they are partly or totally forced to renounce. In the short story *Al-'ajz al-abyad* (The White Languor) from the collection *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight) Thurayya almost exactly paints her own situation in which the sudden war activity gave rise to such a shock that for a long time afterwards she was

unable to write, only on the suggestion and persuasion of her husband did she start to break through. It is also on the basis of her own example that she presents the psychological devastation caused by the pressures of war and the ordinary fear experienced during this tragic period, when the pen was also treated as a weapon.

The short story *Rajul bila 'aynayn* (The Man without Eyes), together with *Kanat hiya ash-shahid* (She was a Witness) from the same collection, betray the depth of human feelings which are full of fear for the lives and health of those nearest to one. However, here it turns out that when she was unable to write she poured her fears and indecisions into painting, as she herself explains: *I discharged my suffering into the picture which moved her internally*.<sup>4</sup> The dramatically expressed episode of the destruction of her own paintings by the bullets of the invader is contained in the short story *Thuqub fi az-zakira* (Gaps in Memory).

The collection of short stories *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles) is saturated with the personal suffering of Thurayya and her family who participated in all the situations that they were to see and experience. Some of the characters have a clearly autobiographical identity, for example the hero of the short stories *Atash Abu Sakhir* (The Thirst of Abu Sakhir) or *Jamr az-zakira* (Rankling Resentment of Memory) from the collection *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles) is the personification of her husband. One feels that all the situations are known to the author from her own personal experience and she provides them with her 'self' in identifying with all the heroes in a kaleidoscope of fragments from the panorama of war events. An excellent example of which is the immense expressiveness in the heroes' experiences during the tragedy of a raid, looting and the fear for one's life presented in the short stories *Abwab mujannaha* (The Winged Doors) and *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles) from the collection of the same title. The autobiographical features of Thurayya Al-Baqsemi's short stories fulfil a dual role: on the one hand they give great credibility to the descriptions and contents, giving this short story form the credibility of a document, while on the other hand as they are the field for her work and erudition they present her life philosophy and the copiousness of a humanistic attitude.

<sup>4</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsemi, *Kanat hiya ash-shahid* from the collection *Rahil an-nawafiz*, p. 26.



# The Style of Thurayya Al-Baqsami's Short Stories

There is no doubt that Thurayya Al-Baqsami is a writer through and through. This is shown by her constant passion for writing since she was a child, as well as her personal attitude. This is the attitude of a person who is open to the formulation artistically of the generality of the problems surrounding human life, as well as being embracing their individual elements of time and place. Her characteristic formulation of utterance is the self-recognition of herself as a competent and just witness of the world, though equally as a polemist gifted with the ability to perceive reality in a non-superficial and artistic way. The writer allows herself to be presented as an accuser and guide, a sensitive reporter and desperate participant in the life that surrounds. Thurayya Al-Baqsami, in directing attention to the problem matter of the human personage, comes across the common aspirations of philosophy and European literature. Due to the place in which her style is created there arises the need for a wider meaning and more artistic conception of known and created values. There is evident in her writing the tendency for a forced and speedy rescue from oblivion of the old images of Kuwait, as equally a defensive attitude as well as non-conformist in the face of the advancing autonomy of contemporary individuals, behind which there starts to gather the anonymous and culturally faceless 'mass', known from the warnings of Elias Canetti.

Thurayya Al-Baqsami's short stories are not long in length. They possess a relatively simple literary construction being composed sometimes of several smaller segments. Their origin is a spontaneous response to the world and experience, while the chronology is almost parallel with real life. The language of the short stories is very lively, in places heavily saturated with the striking colours of the Orient, yet with this simple and concise. Her brevity in utterance, which does not leave her even in the elaborately constructed images of war and love, results from the fact that the writer herself – like many writers of this time – is a *psychologically strong character – able to recognise herself as the source of internal acts, to order experiences into the spirit of one's own needs and aims, to make choices which*

*are the condition for a sense of freedom.*<sup>1</sup> Thurayya in being just such an artist freely uses not only literary language but also a typically visual organisation and artistic abbreviation through the help of symbol, allegory, and metaphor achieving as a result substantial expressiveness in utterance.

Thurayya Al-Baqsmi, in deciding on the total composition of the work and guaranteeing it an internal coherence of theme, mainly deals with matters that are close, taking place immediately around or matters only just experienced. Such a selection of subjects guarantees on the one hand cohesion of the factual graphic details, particularly relative to the occupation and the further fate of the family and her fatherland, with on the other hand a reliability of the psychic, psychological and experimental side of an exhausted creative personality. Although Thurayya does not dwell on romantic experiences it is in her literature as was stated by the Polish critic Włodzimierz Maciąg: *love is a privileged state for it is the foundation of the acquaintance of values and in this sense it is the basis of our humanity and it guarantees us subjectivity the most effectively.*<sup>2</sup> The motif of love is incorporated in the majority of short stories. It is also perceivable in the short stories stamped by the tragic stigma of war from the last two collections. It is to a certain degree a dramatic determinant or equally the harmonious development of the action that unfolds. The undertaking of subjects of love, or social and dramatic conflicts and non-righteousness are never in Thurayya's prose superficial, delicate or sentimental or feminine in the nature of the style used. An important feature of her style is the courageous emphasis of the problem or action even if there is no literary hope for a harmonious reaction to the tension evoked.

The style of Thurayya Al-Baqsmi's artistic utterance in her short stories is saturated as equally with features of emotional formation as with cold calculated thought, which is connected with the singular motivation of the author of an expressive-impressive nature giving the effect of a composition stamped with the unique mark of individuality. It is undoubtedly determined by psychic qualities, origin and the social status of the author as well as her writing senses. Her superb artistic abilities in the undertaking of a subject allow her a larger amount of discipline in the language of portrayal, without involving herself in dualist structures. Both elements take place vicariously or simultaneously. In various variants the

<sup>1</sup> Włodzimierz Maciąg, *Nasz Wiek XX*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1992, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.



word substitutes for the image, the image replaces the word, thought supplements emotion, emotion supplements intellect, the word constructs the image, and the image symbolises the word. The narrative descriptions, in possessing such rich possibilities and means of expression, in Thurayya Al-Baqsamī's short stories take on a huge dynamism without weltered wordiness. Even ordinary descriptions are often intertwined with certain elements in which a symbol appears, with its presence 'electrifying and momentarily establishing the appropriate mood and type of culminating point.

Even though the intellectual reflection is extremely integrally written into the course of the short stories the reader has no doubts and deliberations as to which side of humanity Thurayya Al-Baqsamī's short stories advance. The specific accentuation of the notional constructions is thickly scattered and hides often in the most simple of sentences or between them – sometimes in typically poetic links.

The world presented in Thurayya Al-Baqsamī's short stories in the entirety of the phenomena presented in it is not only a reflection of what might be observed by the outside observer involved in some subject for his work. What Thurayya presents tells of her deep involvement in a whole broad cultural range of existence, most clearly comprehended as unlimited in time and space, as well as remaining beyond the individual characteristics of fate. Sex and social role in the close connection with the whole world of 'consciousness'. Certain evasions or 'sorties' in metaphors and allegories, besides their specific range of imagination, reflect the richness of possibilities and the intellectual seizure of the difficult problems of contemporary human existence. For today, at the close of an era it is difficult not to admit that one of the most living cultural threats is the loss of former diversity, the former freshness of view and wisdom, for the sake of contemporary globalised unification. The internal aspiration of Thurayya's style can protect one against this loss of a higher sense and the direct quality and individuality of existence. The eminent Polish writer Stanisław Przybyszewski has written:

Twofold is the road to understand life. One is wide, worn, safe and comfortable, the other unworn, leading over precipices, and full of deadly danger. Is that not how they describe it in the old fairy tales? The comfortable road is the route of the mind, the way of the poor five senses which are able to grasp life only in its fortuitousness, in its hopeless triteness. The steep road full of ravines is the route

of the soul, for which life is a heavy dream and dark foreboding. Real life in its essence and content...<sup>5</sup>

Thurayya Al-Baqsami appears to avoid extreme attitudes, as with Stanisław Przybyszewski she is no less alien to the fear of the actuality of real life's values, the subjective reliability of the personality, at this time already disorientated, which could be the expression and guarantee of her authenticity to freedom. It is an attitude which does not identify itself with the checked models of the past or with the model of contemporariness which is fighting for its own all-encompassing and unifying model of civilisation.

<sup>5</sup> Stanisław Przybyszewski, *Na drogach duszy* (Introduction), Kraków 1995.

# The Image of War in the Eyes of Thurayya Al-Baq sami

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, for the first time in contemporary Arab history one brother Arab nation attacked another. This was the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait. (As a matter of fact, Gamal 'Abd An-Naser was asked earlier to send troops to maintain the Syrian-Egyptian unity signed in 1958, but he refused however, and the union collapsed in 1961).<sup>1</sup>

There were many reasons for the attack, including economic, political as well as social. In Iraq there was a severe crisis brought about by the many years of war with Iran. Iraq's internal social problems were not without influence. Out of a population of 18 million people the professional army constituted 5.5%. Besides which it is important to remember that a whole 10% of the world's arms went to Iraq.<sup>2</sup> Following the many years of the Iran-Iraq War, both Iran, Iraq as those countries that made up the Gulf Co-operation Council, were extremely financially weakened.

At this very time we observe in Kuwait a difficult political situation which arises against the backcloth of disagreement between the authorities and opposition which leads to Parliament's disbandment. Certainly of significance were the ambitions of Saddam Hussein himself, who considered himself to be the great leader of the Arab world. He claimed that a revolution would break out in Kuwait and that he would be asked to send in armed forces and so fulfil his obligation.<sup>3</sup> The historical pretext was Saddam Hussein's conviction in Iraq's historical territorial right to Kuwait. He claimed that he was occupying Kuwait to the agreement of all Arabs, through which he would arrive at the joining of poor and rich countries. He also considered that Arab countries should mutually help each other.

<sup>1</sup> Dr Turki Al-Hamad, *Al-ghazu: al-asbab al-mawdu'iyya wa al-mubarrarat al-ay-diyulujjiyya* (Invasion: Thematic and Ideological Reasons), in: *Al-ghazu al-'iraqi fi Al-Kuwayt* (The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait), Kuwait 1995, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

He accused the leaders of the rich emirates of locating money in Europe and America.<sup>4</sup> Saddam Hussein's most absurd argument was the religious reason. He wanted to fight with the infidels. For which purpose he even changed his name to 'Abd Allah Al-Mu'min. This is all the more absurd considering that Iraq post 1958 has been a secular state.<sup>5</sup>

So on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 1990 Iraqi aggression against Kuwait became fact. People were shocked that the enemy is a brother country speaking the same language, possessing the same traditions and religion. They expressed this disbelief also in literature. The subject was taken up by men as well as women, with Thurayya Al-Baqsami, Layla Al-'Uthman, Muna Ash-Shafa'i, Layla Muhammad Salih, Walid Ar-Rujayyib finding themselves among them.

The war bare, unexpected, without the honour of old and the Arab code of chivalry, shook Thurayya Al-Baqsami to her very core. It was to signify a tragic change in her life, following which nothing could ever be the same as before. Although the scale of the victims and destruction is incomparable to the Second World War in Europe, for a small peaceful country living a comfortable existence the war was a real disaster. And so in the way that following the tragedy of concentration camps during the Second World War it was asked whether one could still be contented with man's fate, and the recognition of the direction of history's development as proper – so in Kuwait many people were able to share such unease. Is the creation of art and literature after the experiencing of such a blow possible?

We may read what constituted Thurayya's reply in the two collections of short stories *Shumu' asaradib* (Cellar Candles) and *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight) as well as the fairy tale for children *Muzakkirat Fattuma al-kuwaytiyya as-saghira* (Recollections of a Small Kuwaiti Fattuma).

The whole of the period of the occupation, awash with its shocking events, is reproduced in the short stories, from the first moments of the aggression – *Kanat hiya ash-shahid* (She was a Witness), *Suwar ma'akusa* (Inverted Images) from the collection *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight), right up to the last day of the war in the short story *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles) from the collection of the same title.

The representation of war is subordinated in Thurayya's writing to her great creative personality, which does not recognise any small perspective

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

whatsoever. Thurayya Al-Baqsamī identifies herself, with the whole of her existence, with the fate of the inhabitants of the occupied country trying to simplify the demands of testimony which could if only in part fulfil the role of document, while being the entire expression of protest and revolt against the inhuman evil of war. Evil, which does not simply interrupt the ordinary, normal fate of society, but tramples all of its sense of dignity, opposes all norms of goodness and rationalism. The discerning reader of the short stories, who is able to ascertain from amongst her prose what he is sensitive to, and shudders at the cruelty of the emphatic scenes of the panorama of war, may get her full picture. For nobody and nothing appears to be missed in her writing. The evil of occupation is witnessed by all the citizens who share the torment of the threat to life and health, the forced separation of families, eviction and escape from interrogation.

Thurayya Al-Baqsamī despite being the heroine of many war stories including *Kanat hiya ash-shahid* (She was a Witness) or *Al-'ajz al-abyad* (The White Infirmary) from the collection *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight) does not concentrate solely upon herself. Her lot is similar to many others', and only the knowledge of her own situation, especially dangerous in relation to the ability to formulate in a literary way, which increases the expressiveness of presentation and authenticity of the subject formulation. It is not easy to write about war in a way which would 'not increase evil'. It seems as if it is Thurayya who has succeeded in this in opposition to many European and World authors for whom war descriptions display the weakness of total hatred for the enemy. Thurayya maintains here, in a state of almost classic balance, the tension of the descriptions of cruelty, the author's poetical interpretation, which soothes the testimony to the image presented. One can see this technique in, for instance, a fragment of the short story *Abwab mujannaha* (The Winged Doors) from the collection *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles):

They went on patrol next to the houses without doors and started to loot what had been left behind. The dates on the palms raised their heads in shame, so as not to observe the despicable scene. The sea turned its face in the direction of Khurum Shahr, while the seagulls flew in search of food amidst the smouldering remains of the houses.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Abwab mujannaha* from the collection *Shumu' as saradib*, Kuwait 1992, p. 41.

The writing of short stories about the subject of war – here understood in the broad sense, and whose form of expression is characterised by the huge quantity of details mentioning acts of looting, executions and human dramas – must have been no easy task for a woman. May be it was only this great literary act that accredited her with being a great literary figure and an astute observer of her times, not avoiding the most difficult things. Ubiquitousness: in painting and prose her poetic element freely allows her to pass over all barriers of feeling and problems, while at the same time it is able to concentrate on the humanistic basis of judging human matters. And war is after all one of the great dilemmas and only a writer's greatness can preserve for others her image, for it not to fall into oblivion, for in point of fact there is no oblivion.

Literature must warn and remind as the great Polish poet Mieczysław Jastrun has expressed in the poem *Of Fire and Ash*:

Of those times of fire and ash  
Will speak the dry tomes of history  
And nobody will know then  
What death tasted like  
For those led to the gallows  
And we knew but one thing  
Man can not live even an hour  
In a world from which hope will leave  
Like water dripping from leaky pipes.<sup>7</sup>

Hope is the heart and face of the writer. The fervour of the broached subject of the fatherland easily brings to mind the abundance of works by European poets and prose writers concerned with the subject of threats to the existence of a nation.

Yet one can wonder what the final implication of the reply to the question what was the war? – on the basis of Thurayya Al-Baqsmi's short stories would be.

The construction of the short stories in which the narration is almost never constant suits the dimension of the threat contained in the undertaking of the subject, while in the subtext it relates to the war itself. This war affected such a small country and the means for engaging in war are already so huge that any defence on the part of an unprepared coun-

<sup>7</sup> Mieczysław Jastrun, *Z ognia i popiołu*, in: *Od Staffa do Wojaczka. Poezja Polska 1959–1985*, p. 267.

try could not be effective. War has never before so quickly engulfed a defenceless society, which took cover in the cellars, lived in cellars and organised resistance. Today annihilation is so easy and does not require any justification, and everyone can watch it as if it were some television war serial.

Thurayya al-Baqsemi's short stories serve to direct attention at the inhuman climate of war, hence the writer herself is an impartial, earnest witness and spokeswoman of an unfalsified reality. She is a sensitive tear-shedding participant easing the cruelty of the facts, attempting to save the beauty amidst the ashes. In this way Thurayya al-Baqsemi's creativity answers the call thrown to her and her country by the period of occupation.





# Symbol and Painting in Thurayya Al-Baqsemi's Creative Output

As Manfred Lurker writes:

When we speak today about literary symbolism we constantly come up against Goethe, who totally accepted the world of phenomena yet saw in it a reflection of a higher reality. Real symbolism is perceived when that which especially represents the entirety does so not as dream and shade but as life and the momentary manifestation of that which is not banal.<sup>1</sup>

In a further part of the interview he writes that *the qualifications of a symbol can be: the carrier of meaning, pictorial concept, comparison, personification, paradigm, model, type, but also archetype, metaphor and allegory...*<sup>2</sup>

Thurayya Al-Baqsemi's prose simply abounds in symbols which appear in the most varied of functions: obstruction, unveiling, drawing attention, the construction of the desired psychological mood, the achievement of an expression of truth or the pure disinterested functioning as a sign.

In the short story *As-sursur* (The Cockroach) from the collection *As-sidra* (The Lotus tree) the title insect is the construction axis for the whole short story. As a symbol it functions in two roles: the first of a direct impression which is disturbing, arousing repugnance, disgust and revolt as well as functioning in the role of 'conveyor of negativity'. In this role it casts a shadow on the whole of life, almost damaging the wedding causing a panic-struck desire to leave the house. In a word it is a real plague. It is the symbol of the persecuted ill fortune, the axis of discord and hindrances that cannot be removed, and the greatest defeat in the life of the heroine in otherwise fairly happy. It is a synonym for threatening aggression:

During my stay at mother's I was paralysed by fear. My thoughts oscillated constantly around the cockroach funerals. I imagined how that cockroach with brown

<sup>1</sup> Manfred Lurker, *Przesłanie symboli w mitach, kulturach i religiach*, Kraków 1994, p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

antenna lay peacefully among the plants, and when I just came near he would move his feelers ironically, smiled and says 'I'm still alive! I'm still alive!'.<sup>3</sup>

It would be interesting to compare this fragment with a short story by one of the most eminent of modern writers Bruno Schulz entitled 'Cockroaches', the mood of which is extremely similar in fear yet differs in its finish, which is a sick fascination with fear:

I remembered really that invasion of cockroaches, that deluge of the black throng which filled the nightly darkness with its spidery running. All the chinks were filled with quivering whiskers, every crack could fire all of a sudden a cockroach, from every break in the floor there could frighten that black bomber weaving a zigzag as it raced across the floor.<sup>4</sup>

In the subsequent short story from the collection *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree) entitled *Al-hafafish* (The Bats) young people are only able to meet in secret, and only when it is dark. They are similar to bats. The derived association in the meaning of the symbol can deal with the unfavourable situation of discomfort and lack of freedom: *My darling, I hate darkness but for you darling I have become a bat that loves the darkness*.<sup>5</sup>

In the short story *Buq'at lawn* (The Colourful Stain) the symbol is identical to the visual designation, though its meaning is negative. 'The Colourful Stain' represents the creative spirit that is not concentrated on higher art, being a sign of defeat and languor: *The white canvas lost its cleanliness because of these vile colourful stains*.<sup>6</sup>

In the title story from the collection *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree) according to the author's own words:

The chief symbol is the lotus tree, which for Muslims is the symbol of good fortune. They consider it to be the favourite tree of the prophet Mohammed who liked to sit under it. There are evidently many lotus trees in paradise. In this short story the lotus is the reason for the hero's madness which could mean that sometimes even the best thing could lead to madness.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsmi, *As-sursur* from the collection *As-sidra*, Kuwait 1988, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Bruno Schulz, *Karakony*, in: *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów*, Wrocław 1989, p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsmi, *Al-hafafish* from the collection *As-sidra*, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsmi, *Buq'at lawn* from the collection *As-sidra*, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> On the basis of an interview carried out by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Thurayya Al-Baqsmi in Kuwait 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1994.

What is important in this short story is that the lotus becomes in the culminating point the object of aggression: *His love for the tree was strong. Anger overcame him and he ran like an arrow. He started to hit women who appeared to him to be the branches of the tree. Then he started to chop down the very tree with an iron axe. The screams increased: No! There is a female demon living in the tree!*<sup>8</sup>

In the short story *Ad-dyflda'* (The Frog) the symbol used is for the shortened characteristics of the ironic interpersonal contact and degenerate desires which condemn man to inhuman work, isolation and scorn: *Her face went pale from fear of the obscene frog which sat on my palm outstretched to the sun.*<sup>9</sup>

Many short stories from the collection *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat) already contain the conveyor of the action of a symbolic, ground-breaking significance – although often of a realistic origin. Such is the case in, for instance, the short story *Ya al-mashmum* (Musk). Manfred Lurker writes:

Everything that is ineffable, in other words unable to find conceptual expression, may be conveyed only in forms semantically loaded with images. The origin of the symbols needs to be explained by the need to possess a visible representation of what is invisible.<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult to express in a conceptional way the type of defeat which social inequality brings about, and especially the romantic dramas which the inequality gives birth to. Musk here is a symbol-sound of imagination joining all the individuals longing for love. This concerns those who are not divided by difference and those who resign from life when feelings only increase their drama of inequality.

In the title story *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat) the language bewitches. It is rich, full of comparisons, colourful metaphors and symbolic references to the old beliefs which are still not devoid of their mysteries. On the short range the description arouses a whole series of associations and visions full of colour relating to nature and the personal experiences of the hero:

<sup>8</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsmi, *As-sidra*, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsmi, *Ad-dyflda'* from the collection *As-sidra*, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Manfred Lurker, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

The Sea dried up with desire like a bull's tongue. That morning the earth greeted the sun clothed in a blue overcoat. In the evening it appears to be black. The black clay reminds me of this view that I saw that morning. It reminds me of my tired mother who pointlessly tries to darn the old abaya. The material of the old abaya does not accept the black thread that is trying to obliterate the old recollections on the old piece of clothing.<sup>11</sup>

In the short story *Ad-dumya* (The Doll) a small handmade doll is equally the subject of equalisation – for it is as beautiful as the kite made by the boy – exchange, as well as sharing. In the final scene the doll that has suddenly been found in the sand recalls the drama of unfulfilled love: *I am absorbed staring deeply into the eyes of my doll. And in her great eyes there appeared shining tears which never dried up.*<sup>12</sup> The doll, the childhood companion and confidant of youthful love communicates to the heroine the death of her beloved through the fact that it has been discarded in this place.

In the collection of short stories entitled *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight) there is to be found in the very title a large symbolic load. Windows from time immemorial have been a lively practical symbol of contact with the world, though equally isolation from the world and its undesirable activities. The window was equally a mystical symbol, located on the border of the internal and external, of the emanation of the joint and unintelligent source of all things. In the title story windows are devoid of all these functions – including safety – for on the whole their panes have been smashed by the war. They are devoid of contact for they are on the whole boarded over or blocked up against attack. They reflect therefore all memories, mysteries and possibilities that are aroused in us usually by windows.

The short story entitled *Al-'ajz al-abyad* (The White Infirmary) from the same collection notionally relates through the symbol the impossibility of describing even a sign, even a letter on a white piece of paper when: *everyone who made use of the pen-weapon signed his own death sentence by hanging.*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsmi, *Al-'araq al-aswad*, Kuwait 1977, p. 71.

<sup>12</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsmi, *Ad-dumya* from the collection *Al-'araq al-aswad*, p. 67.

<sup>13</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsmi, *Al-'ajz al-abyad* from the collection *Rahil an-nawafiz*, Kuwait 1994, p. 63.

The symbolism of the tree in the short story entitled *Ashjar Ba'quba* (The Ba'quba Trees) links itself to the mood of the prisoner-of-war camp, where those held captive and their families are seen as tree branches severed from each other and mutilated: *I felt as if I was one of the branches (...) Crying ran through the people, and a current of sadness moved from place to place encompassing all the trees and branches, which embraced, when the time to depart came, the end of the visit.*<sup>14</sup>

In certain short stories the role of the symbol is fulfilled by separate images that especially rivet attention. They conceal nothing, they indicate nothing except for themselves and they only represent ordinary reality. This is the situation in the short story *Suwar ma'kusa* (Inverted Images). Here the image-symbol talks clearly about the whole of reality devoid of order, hope and normality, a reality where everything already happens in reverse: *She wanted to escape from the reality which had turned everything upside down.*<sup>15</sup> We know that Thurayya Al-Baqsamī is also a painter, and therefore for her an inverted or holed image is a sign of terrible evil and symbolises extermination. She gives expression to this in the following words from the short story: *Oh God, it's a tank! Why is it going against the current? It is because the image is inverted.*<sup>16</sup>

Thurayya Al-Baqsamī as an artist allows us sometimes to enter into her act of recognition and symbolic notation of thought and new associations freely expressing it through the language of fairy tales. In the short story entitled *Rajul bila 'aynayn* (The Man without Eyes) tragic suppositions are veiled in fairy tale fantasies:

I yearn... and paint my feelings. Celestial, yellow stars embrace the eyebrows of the sky, adorning the forehead of the sea's fiancée with a fish's tail and woman's heart. They prey upon her feelings which lead to me drawing in the sand, on the seashore your eyes which are washed by the wave. It has discovered that you are a man without eyes! I still see your face in the sand, but without eyes, for the divine nymphs have stolen them.<sup>17</sup>

The entire short story is constructed as reflection and at the same time a play on the imagination of the individual worrying about the fate of her beloved husband during the war. As equally love as creative fantasy

<sup>14</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Ashjar Ba'quba*, *op.cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>15</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Suwar ma'akusa*, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Rajul bila 'aynayn*, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

is her allies, easing anxiety with her importunate internal vision riveting attention.

Thurayya Al-Baqsamī had already as a child discovered her love of art. Thurayya Al-Baqsamī's high artistic qualifications have allowed her to be the illustrator for those short stories that are the dearest for her. And in turn has made her the author of the art work in all of her collections: *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat), *Al-sidra* (The Lotus Tree), the collections of war short stories *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles), *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight) and the children's fairy tale *Muzakki-rat Fattuma al-kuwaytiyya as-saghira* (Recollections of a Small Kuwaiti Fattuma). The line drawings contained in the first collection *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Back Sweat) are of a high artistic quality. In the sensitive and studied line we can discern many years of academic study along with its own creative personality. This picture makes use of the European expressionist legacy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Visible here is the features of other cultures. Only to a limited degree do we find here typical Arabic details. The drawings are on themselves a distinct act of artistic activity. It can be felt how they do not remain in a subordinate but parallel relation to the short stories themselves. Amongst them the illustrations to the short stories *Umm Adam* (Umm Adam)<sup>18</sup> and *Al-mulla* (The Teacher) are of especial note.<sup>19</sup>

During the occupation she painted a lot, as writing was a risky job to undertake for reasons of safety. Being an artistically versatile individual, and having travelled extensively as a consequence, she had been able to freely participate in the current artistic directions and tendencies that manifested themselves in modern art. It is worth remembering that she is the author of the book *Al-marsam al-hurr wa rihla 25 'aman* (Free Painting over 25 Years) which deals with contemporary Kuwaiti painters.<sup>20</sup>

In her notes she writes about the inspiration drawn from the pictures and creators of world art. She admires the dynamism of Picasso, the colours of Matisse, and the naive depth of Gauguin.

The illustrations for the second collection published in 1988 and entitled *Al-sidra* (The Lotus tree) appear to be more dependent upon the

<sup>18</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Umm Adam* from the collection *Al-'Araq al-aswad*, Kuwait 1977, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Al-mulla*, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>20</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Al-marsam al-hurr wa rihla 25 'aman*, Kuwait 1986.

short stories they accompany. Their form expresses Thurayya's later creative tendency. Here there are numerous stylisations, strongly sketched figures, of whom much points to the inspiration of distant eras. Amongst the drawings the composition for the title story *Al-sidra* (The Lotus tree) deserves especial note,<sup>21</sup> where there appears the symbolical threatening figure – as if an ancient mask – of the tree which on the one hand is adored, and on the other hand threatens. The drawing of the winged artist with her back to her work which is an illustration to the short story *Buq'at lawn* (The Colourful Stain) is exceptionally forceful in its expression.<sup>22</sup> In this drawing there appears the symbolism that marginally conveys known cultural associations – the hand of Fatima, a bird or sunflower. Symbolism that is especially typical for Thurayya's later creativity. The colourful cover for the collection of short stories *As-sidra* (The Lotus tree) presents a stylised portrait of a woman adorned with the symbolic and stylised elements of the living world and the world of the imagination. It may constitute the personification of female judgement and at the same time universal inspiration.

The collection *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles) published in 1992 is bound in a cover whose artistic origin could go back to Europe's cultural inheritance. One can find there the expressionist locution of the eminent creators of the 1920s and 1930s. The drawings contained within the volume display the stylised figure typical for her later period. The drama of content – in a way similar to Greek formulations – is almost invisible. Among the pieces the illustrations to the short stories *Abwab mujannaha* (The Winged Doors),<sup>23</sup> and *Atash Abu Sakhir* (The Thirst of Abu Sakhir) stand out in a way reminiscent of Chagall, i.e. full of lyricism, stories noticeably more modern in their division and style.

*Muzakkirat Fattuma al-kuwaytiyya as-saghira* (Recollections of a Small Kuwaiti Fattuma) published in 1992, which describes the war experiences of Fattuma – the daughter of Thurayya – is illustrated in a way typical for fairy tales, a style brought closer to that of colourful children's drawings as well as the child's own pictures that display an unusual talent.

<sup>21</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Al-sidra* from the collection *Al-sidra*, Kuwait 1988, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Buq'at lawn*, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>23</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Abwab mujannaha* from the collection *Shumu' as-saradib*, Kuwait 1992, p. 40.

The last collection to date is the collection of short stories entitled *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight) published in 1994, which the author comments upon in the following way that *it conveys the deepest artistic expression and possesses a very select graphic attire*.<sup>24</sup> The stylisation of the illustrations is unusually varied and developed. Often they are two or three work compositions, while the contents of the individual segments of the image are full of lyricism and mutually contributive in details. The subtly stylised drawings saturated with content convey the tragic mood of the short stories they accompany. Particularly striking is the visual harmony of the drawn illustrations and the short story *Rajul bila 'aynayn* (The Man without Eyes)<sup>25</sup> and the almost ancient, heroic tragic nature of the illustrations for the short story *Thuqub fi az-zakira* (Gaps in Memory).<sup>26</sup> The illustrations to the short story *Qalbuha al-akhdar* (Her Green Heart) is characterised by the poetic beauty of the distant composition.<sup>27</sup>

In the course of her now long artistic career Thurayya has tried many different artistic techniques. In one of the interviews she answered, to the question – How can one exhibit so many different works at one exhibition? – *I hasten after the heart when it paints or writes because every work speaks of true experience, and my experiences are as varied as these works*.<sup>28</sup> The artist uses in her creative work extremely lively colours even vivid at times, for she feels life extremely strongly. The lack of greyness conveys the incessant artistic stimulation and creative passion. Sky blue is extensively used for this emphasises her astrological sign Pisces, as well as green and brown for they are the most abundant in nature. The use of black is relatively limited for as the artist claims it is too static and depressing in expression. In one of the interviews she assures [us] that: *I will paint for as long as I am able to paint. I will organise exhibitions. This gives me the opportunity to meet people and the chance of constructive criticism [necessary] to improve my own art*.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> On the basis of an interview carried out by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Thurayya Al-Baqsamī in Kuwait 7<sup>th</sup> April 1995.

<sup>25</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Rajul bila 'aynayn* from the collection *Rahil an-nawafiz*, Kuwait 1994, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Thuqub fi az-zakira*, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>27</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, *Qalbuha al-akhdar*, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Nirmala Janssen, *Heart on canvas*, Kuwait, in: 'Arab Times', December 1992.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*



Thurayya is as equally at home with acrylics as other painting techniques, as is the case with graphics, drawing and ceramics. She always wants to express something with her images and graphics and even simple drawings that attract attention and cause intrigue. She moves equally freely amidst cultures to which she has devoted individual studies: Mesopotamian, Indian, Greek (including the civilisation from the Failaka Island), as well as African.

Arab motives and presentations border in her with the religious and secular metaphors of other cultural knowledge and civilising experience. *Her art can possibly be described best as giving – the unlimited giving of time and feeling.*<sup>50</sup> In each of her works – as writes Kamila Ahmad in the above cited article – there exist sharp lines and the pulse of the East can be felt. Some of the works have a title before they are undertaken, others receive theirs as an already finished picture. The pieces that arose during the war are especially noted for their layered symbolism. Numerous intercultural symbols contained in the drawings and graphics are witness to her humanistic attitude and intrepid imagination where there is no division into the present and future, where everything is present, the whole stock of the civilised formation of thought. *'The Talk of Peace'* was created during the Iraqi invasion in February 1991. A man with a bird is portrayed in the picture. The man is a king – the symbol of history – who talks about the peace to pigeon, which is also the symbol of peace.

In later works the divisions are often complex and superficially are composed of several segments filled with a different magical-symbolic content as in *The Alphabet of Peace* (1991). In this work in six segments abstract-magical images are in proximity to signs connected with the symbolism of peace, including a face, pigeon, and arrow. The different colours of each of the segments create however a harmonious composition in a warming ranges of colours. Another painting consisting of three parts is entitled *The Folk Song*. It was painted in 1995 and it is acrylic and mix media. In the first part in the upper left corner one can notice the half-moon, which symbolise the Orient, and on the right side: the symbol of a meeting. There is a green tree under the half-moon – the symbol of goodness. Next to it, there is a pigeon which represents the peace, a fish below the tree means fertility. In the right bottom corner we can find ornaments from Bedouin folk. The second and the third parts have been filled lav-

<sup>50</sup> Kamila Ahmad, in: 'Al-buraq', Kuwait, February 1994, vol. 1, No 6, p. 22.

ishly with decorations from Bedouin's sadu. In the centre of the second part of this triptych one can see a camel and the hand of Fatima, which are very common symbols of Arabic countries. In both parts one can find kites, which for Thurayya Al-Baqsami depict the freedom, likewise to the meaning of the pigeon. There is a palm in the centre of the third part – another Arabic symbol of goodness. In every one part of the discussed triptych we can find three half-moons of different shape. Thurayya wants to admit that all these symbols are quite universal for the Arab word.

In the catalogue from her XIII exhibition we read:

In the majority of her pictures the dream about peace is obvious. The white doves appeared more than once conveying the true yearning to put an end to the real spectres. In the pictures all the figures are without hair, recalling rather mummies than human beings, pointing to the approaching terrible end and death. Only through symbolism could humanism express its total despair and protest.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> The catalogue from Thurayya al-Baqsami's XIII<sup>th</sup> exhibition held at the Ghadir Gallery, Kuwait 25<sup>th</sup> November–25<sup>th</sup> December 1991.

# Tradition, Modernity and Innovation in the Creativity of Thurayya Al-Baq sami

The descriptions and lasting images of the conditions of life that were once true for Kuwaiti society from the period prior to the oil boom were conveyed to Thurayya for certain by her immediate family. A boom whose fates within the short stories are recognisable. Often that reality was observed and remembered by the same small girl that was Thurayya. It was in her life that this attrition of these two worlds: the worlds of tradition and modernity took place. In a series of short stories, especially those from the collections: *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat) and *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree) there appears and disappears the reality of former Kuwaiti culture that was divided tribally: into poor and rich, urban and Bedouin, women and men. We find in the short stories almost the entire survey of former places and events crucial for this small yet varied society.

In the short story *Ya al-mashmum* (Musk) from the collection *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat) the action is played out at a market where people from various backgrounds meet, where deals are struck and which is a place of conflict and amusement. Thurayya describes the bazaar colourfully, something that has already disappeared from modern Kuwait along with its hot and spicy atmosphere. The youngest generation and their successors will learn of traditional forms of trade and the Arab bazaar from the short stories of Thurayya Al-Baq sami and Sulayman Ash-Shatti. In the short story *Umm Adam* (Adam's Mother) we are witnesses of the sad fate of a lonely old woman, *who lived in the same district as father*.<sup>1</sup> The circumstances that accompany a traditional wedding are described in the short stories: *'Arus al-qamar* (A Fiancée like the Moon) and *Ad-dumya* (The Doll). The short story entitled *Al-mulabbas* (The Sweet) presents the situation of underage employees while presenting a certain fragment from the history of the writer's father. Finally the short

<sup>1</sup> On the basis of a interview carried out by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Thurayya al-Baq sami in Kuwait 28<sup>th</sup> October 1994.

story *Al-mulla* (The Teacher) initiates us in the severe and cruel conditions of learning the Koran, the knowledge of which was once the most important reason for parental and school satisfaction.

The short stories from the second collection *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree) deal with matters of social inequality, like for instance the title short story where the division of society into social classes is presented. It talks of the attachment to former dependence, conditioning and social anticipation. The short story *As-saf'a* (The Blow) introduces us to a situation of women's dependence on men.

The unequal status of individuals living in urban areas and that of the wandering nomadic Bedouins belongs to the traditional social conditioning organising the individual and making him the property and instrument of the dominating social grouping. The author characterises the origin of the short story *Ya al-mashmum* (Musk) talking about it in the following way:

The idea for the story was given me by my father. It is a story that really happened. My father had a stall with sweets at the market. He was visited by a boy from the Ma'arifi family, one of the richest Kuwaiti families, who was in love with a Bedouin. The boy was a Shi'ite while she a Sunni. Both families were against the marriage claiming that there was more that divided them than joined them.<sup>2</sup>

And what can one say about the then situation of women on the basis of short stories? *Women rested in their homes, they gave birth to children like sheep, and they filled their husbands' stomachs with food. There was no one here who could guarantee me safety and a secure future.<sup>3</sup> I am the man Ahmad. For a man this is glorious work, but not for a woman! Whoever works outside of the home can easily sell his dignity while he sells his goods.<sup>4</sup>*

Thurayya herself in telling this does not hide as if distrust:

When a girl was eleven years old she had to put a kerchief on her head and dress well. While when she was fourteen she was shut indoors and waited to get married. The women at that time got up about 5 am and prepared breakfast. Then they brought sea-water for washing and bathing. Next they cleaned and tidied, looked at the animals. Around midday there was dinner, after which the women washed the children and did the washing in the sea. They only visited the neigh-

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Thurayya al-Baqsamī, *Ya al-mashmum* from the collection *Al-'araq al-aswad*, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

bours in the evening. Many women sold their wares at the bazaars, for example clothes. Then the whole family lived together, and the women mutually helped each other.<sup>5</sup>

And what can one learn about the fate of the boys? This question is superbly illustrated in the short story entitled *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat):

My father died when I was a twelve-year-old child. He left me a difficult legacy: a widow with five children. Wherever I looked around I saw open hungry mouths. As if for irony I was unable to ward off this hunger despite working hard all day. The hunger and poverty that touched us was the law of a poor society. And the one aim in my life was to remedy this. Initially I worked as an errand boy for one of the shops. From morning to night I was beaten for everything I did or others did. The shop's owner imagined that he had the right to take it out on me and torture my poor body.<sup>6</sup>

On the basis of these fragments of stories and the author's own accounts we are presented with an image of life before the discovery of oil which is not the easiest and most pleasant; difficult and unpleasant for both girls and boys. They were forced to work hard in excess of a child's capacity. Often they were burdened with family responsibilities that were beyond their capabilities. Their growing up was a long way then from sentiments and enjoyment. Used to hard work they found short moments of relief in walking along and being by the seashore. It was the sea that was their greatest joy. The sea was also a workplace from which many families made a living. The inhabitants of the Gulf and Kuwait are still strongly linked emotionally to the sea even though it no longer represents the only source of livelihood, relaxation and joy in the face of the many possibilities of travel and relaxation beyond the country's borders.

Arab society was always strongly linked with magic and the belief in various genies. Once they were dominant in the mentality of society and everything that occurred to man: disease, death, loss in business had its roots in extraterrestrial powers, ghosts and genies. In the short story *Umm Adam* Thurayya Al-Baqami describes the beliefs and superstitions prevalent at the time as something that was indispensably connected with everyday life.

<sup>5</sup> On the basis of an interview, *op.cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqami, *Al-'araq al-aswad*, pp. 68–70.

In almost every short story from the collection *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat) or *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree) there appears some dramatic thread. The contradictoriness and insolvable paradox of the former style of thinking and inseparably accompanied the lives of people then abundant in drama.

The short stories often end in tragic death or separation. When it seems even that love can overcome human contradictions and prejudiced judgements then the very heroes do not feel as if strong enough to defend their rights or feelings. Such is the case in the short stories *Yā al-mashmum* (Musk) and *Ad-dumya* (The Doll). The old father in the title story represents the insoluble nature of such problems and choices from the collection *As-sidra* (The Lotus Tree). Differences in material possession linked often to differences in origin are a constant source of strong emotions; anger, aggression or hatred. Knocking man as if from his natural route as is the case with the hero of the short story entitled *Al-'araq al-aswad* (The Black Sweat): *I don't know the taste of a woman. She is a lamb that has to be bought. While I only have enough money for the evening bread. I can't afford to buy myself a wife.*<sup>7</sup> Sometimes however there ignites in them open revolt: *You are a proletarian, and those have got a lot of money. This is the law that governs society. I categorically oppose this. This law has been laid down by human greed and rapacity. This is the worst form of behaviour. They said that slavery had come to an end.*<sup>8</sup> It is, however, on the whole only a weak protest within the sphere of the hero's internal monologue who daily does not believe in any change. Yet changes have come and what the short stories of Thurayya Al-Baqsamī show is the presentation for new generations of what no longer exists or the slow disappearance of a certain image recorded in the clip of an insane film of violent changes.

One needs to emphasise that the last two of Thurayya Al-Baqsamī's short story collections: *Shumu 'as-saradib* (Cellar Candles) and *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight) bear witness to the great development in her writing. One can already see in her a mature and fully experienced writer. Thurayya's innovations in the short story include the presentation of contemporary types of hero, chiefly the presentation of educated individuals, women artists and their partners. This corresponds, and some-

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

times is directly related to autobiographical events of the author herself as, for instance, in the short story *Kanat hiya ash-shahid* (She was a Witness) from the collection *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight). The society in which these individuals live has itself undergone fundamental changes, for love and work are no longer forbidden; they become slowly values that must and should be defended. The author herself evaluates the situation as follows: *Now everything depends on people. Everyone lives as they consider proper, and society has no right to interfere as was once the case.*<sup>9</sup>

The heroes and heroines of Thurayya Al-Baqsamī's later short stories are already individuals who have been brought into contact with humanistic perspectives on the vision of the individual and society, as well as adopting these perspectives as their own. They represent the ability to present a creative testimony of reality even in the face of the threats of war. During this threat there disappears the most conservative division into active and passive roles, male and female.

The war described in the short stories requires heroism from all. This finds its reflection in the short story *Zaman al-inhidar* (Time of Decline) from the collection *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles). Separation, even if like that in the short story *Ashjar Ba'quba* (The Ba'quba Trees) from the collection *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight) informs one of deep feelings which nobody is able to defend. Among models of marriage we associate ourselves with the partner model and the mutually aiding which is presented, among others, in the short story *Jamr az-zakira* (Rankling Resentment of Memory) from the collection *Shumu' as-saradib* (Cellar Candles). Lonely women are not yet deprived of their own problems, though they are already to a much greater degree emancipated and independently directing their fate, as the heroine of the short story *Qalbuha al-ahdar* (Her Green Heart) from the collection *Rahil an-nawafiz* (The Windows' Flight).

One can ascertain in Thurayya Al-Baqsamī's short stories the influence of European literature as equally the pervasion of the cultural ideas of the east and west. Thurayya's heroines have no creative complexes, yet they are tormented with the worry as to whether they will find time to work on the method and depth of their art. The names of the great paint-

<sup>9</sup> On the basis of an interview conducted by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Thurayya Al-Baqsamī in Kuwait 28<sup>th</sup> October 1994.

ers Salvador Dali and Van Gogh appear in the comprehensively thought out contexts and thoughts.

In the very language of the prose there is a departure from the reporting, true realistic account in favour of the language of poetic prose, the flow of associations, the intermingling of narration with fantasy and the direct utterance. This is especially interesting in the short stories *Kanat hiya ash-shahid* (She was a Witness) and *Rajul bila 'aynayn* (The Man without Eyes) from the collection *Rahil an-nawqiz* (The Windows' Flight).

In the majority of the works one can see a tendency to reproduce through the language of direct relation the facts presented, as well as through creative parallel presentation and the graphic fantasy of one's own view – strengthening polemics with reality through one's own utterance. This is the conscious attempt to overcome the limitation of the narrow expression of the problems characteristic for many contemporary European works.

Within the hidden layers of Thurayya Al-Baqsmi's prose there is as if a discussion on the subject of the violent political and social changes that the country has undergone. It raises many questions, of which a part remains still without an answer. It seems true that the barbarian routine, motivated by magical subordination, of influence and decisions on the unit of society should not last. Whether it should terminate the close bonds and mythical bases of the civilisation of a given place is already another matter. Thurayya considers that symbols, genies and spirits can exist within the safe environment of art, to which access is only through education or intuitive recognition. It appears that Thurayya Al-Baqsmi wants to preserve at least a part of that old world, where besides the ordinary forgetfulness in the process of economic changes it has its own worst enemy – war which shoves it into extermination shaking the existence of the entire nation. This enemy brings into doubt the efforts of whole civilisations. How is one to maintain continuity in man's possibilities, save history, while at the same time not impeding the individual so that he feels free and happy?



# *Fi kaffi 'usfura zarqa'* (The Blue Sparrow on My Palm) — Thurayya Al-Baqsamī's Poetical World

It is no easy task to write about the poetry of Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, it constituting no mean challenge. Thurayya has been writing poetry almost since childhood. During her period of study in Moscow she even wrote poetry in Russian, and upon returning to Kuwait she had her own poetry column entitled *Nuqush* (Sketches) within the pages of the 'Al-Watan' newspaper. Since 1994 she has published her texts in the journal 'Al-Qabas' in a column entitled *Nusus wa risha* (Texts and Brush). She herself illustrates her poetry with drawings. The verse that is found in the daily press is hugely popular because of its specific and symbolic vision of feelings and human desires as well as for the criticism of Kuwaiti and Arab society that it contains.

Thurayya Al-Baqsamī, so it appears, has yet to develop a definite attitude towards the phenomenon of her own poetical creativity. These works can be neither considered poetry nor prose. The matter is left open for the reader. It seems that they are works written in poetical prose in which one may perceive the beauty of poetic language, while the author herself feels herself a poet. Thurayya writes as such in the forewords to her first volume of poetry published in Kuwait in 1999 and entitled *Fi kaffi 'usfura zarqa'* (The Blue Sparrow on My Palm):

These are the travel memoirs of a woman upon whose palm sang a blue sparrow. In her hair there grow wild mountain flowers. It is a pleasant game with a text which drags me from a warm bed in order to seat me at my desk for work. How often I escaped to this game when the brushes, colours and canvases of my pictures were helpless to express my feelings. In the 1990s I travelled a lot in connection with my exhibitions all over the world. Airports and planes replaced the cool of the room. I wrote my texts amidst the noise of these trips, and this writing became my enjoyable everydayness and my primary work. These texts came to life on the cold plastic benches of various airports and stations, the insides of a crazy carriage that subdued English meadows, as equally the lanes of Brussels. They were texts dedicated to a man who carried my love like a talisman and to a woman whom

I created from a dream, that I surrounded with pain and gave her back the sun after I had placed a bracelet on her legs.<sup>1</sup>

There is no narcissism in Thurayya's poetry, there are mysteries though. Her thoughts create an image which changes into experience. The author tries to relate every poem to the definite time and place it arose in. She writes poetry everywhere, as is borne out by the footnotes under the works. The volume under analysis covers works written in the period from 1994 to 1999 in various places in the world: from Kuwait through Europe and America. I would like, in realising the lack of temporal perspective in viewing this form of artistic utterance on the part of Thurayya Al-Baqsemi, to here embody besides the dryness of analysis the magic of the first moments spent on reading the poetry.

Who therefore is Thurayya Al-Baqsemi writing for?

I write for the woman who is the most important thought for me. I assembled these thoughts on board aeroplanes. I write for the young maiden who fell from the sky through an ozone hole, for the masks which fell on Suq an-nakhasa, for the saint who intoxicated me with the wine of his eyes.<sup>2</sup>

She also does not forget about men. As Muhammad Bassam Sarmini writes: *Thurayya attempts to paint with the brush of an artist the throne of masculinity in the way she imagines it and desires it abundant in love and holy desires.*<sup>3</sup>

The whole volume of poetry is divided into four subsections:

1. *Ji'tu lil'alam fi muzhara samita* (I Came to the World in a Silent March) (p. 15),
2. *Imra' 'ajiza bijinah kabir* (The Helpless Woman with a Huge Wing) (p. 85),
3. *Qalb mumaddad 'ala mastabat madhbah* (The Heart Spread on the Slaughtering Platform) (p. 127),
4. *Hina taju' al-'asafir* (Where the Sparrows are Hungry) (p. 163).

Through the beautifully poetic title of the whole volume *Fi kaffi 'usfura zarqa'* (The Blue Sparrow on My Palm) the author hopes to present

<sup>1</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqsemi, *Hikaya nusus*, an introduction to the collection of poetry *Fi kaffi 'usfura zarqa'*, Kuwait 1999, pp. 10–13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Bassam Sarmini, *Fi kaffi 'usfura zarqa'*. *Khat'at Thurayya Al-Baqsemi al-laziza*, "Al-Kuwayt Magazine", No 200, Kuwait 2000, pp. 24–25.

us with a guide through her collection – the little blue sparrow which is her inspiration.

The largest number of poems devoted to a woman are to be found in the first part. It is worth looking at the interesting work *Qarar imra'* (A Woman's Decision)<sup>4</sup>

Another woman, who  
Lives within me  
Decided to leave  
She sold her lottery tickets  
And next year's tights  
Took the coffee dregs  
From the bottom of the cup  
And read her future in the tail  
Of the cloud  
She took fear...  
Lost faith  
And cancelled her decision to leave

Kuwait 1997

This poem could only have been written by an emancipated woman who fears neither defeat nor risk. The work reminds one of European poetry, existentialist in mood. It is a short poetical report on the state of a woman who reveals some other personage – her alter ego, who yearns to achieve on her own account her life plans. She thrashes about, checks the appropriateness of the decision, she reads the coffee dregs trying to penetrate the sentence of fate yet gives up on the attempt. This poem forcibly confirms the existence of another "I" in man, who prompts, gives pointers, believes in fortune telling and calls forth various psychological and emotional states in what would appear to be ordinary life.

The work entitled *Lugha khassa* (A Remarkable Tongue)<sup>5</sup>

Your eyes are a remarkable tongue  
Engraved on a stone slab  
The song  
Sung by the young girls of spring  
The legend  
Which was created amidst the winter stoves  
Your eyes

<sup>4</sup> Thurayya Al-Baqami, *Fi kaffi 'usfura zarqa'*, Kuwait 1999, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

I am tired with describing them  
I have hidden them  
In the saddle of my she camel  
Beyond the rays of your eyes  
Extracted like a flash of lightning  
From the dome of the sky

Bahrain, November 1994

The matters here presented are unclear, the expression of fascination genuine, yet the point of enchantment or charisma is hidden, and it adds magic and the impressive feature of struggle or adventure in the search for meaning. It seems to be an allegorical image of eyesight more than an actual experience.

A filigree miniature composed of a mere four lines is the work entitled 'Awda (Return).<sup>6</sup> Although it was written in Muscat it recalls in its construction a Japanese haiku. The surprising culminating point and the condensed content oscillate around youth, forgetfulness and recollection.

I will return to my youth  
Which I have forgotten  
In the depths of the cupboard  
Of sandalwood

Muscat, May 1999

Another poem entitled *Wilada* (Birth)<sup>7</sup> appears to be an autobiographical song of Thurayya herself, who was conceived in a womb filled with ink.

I was not born in one moment  
I did not steal time nor wasted  
A minute  
I came to this world in a silent march  
I learnt to cry  
Under the skin  
And cry in a womb  
Filled with ink

Kuwait, April 1996

This work is existential reflection. It contains reflections concerning human births renewed by the latest experience. It talks of the courage

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

of unlost time, hidden by the cry, shout and determination of the fragile future of human existence.

*Janaza mulawwana* (The Colourful Funeral)<sup>8</sup> is an impressional poem saturated to its core with elements of quick-wittedness. Here is striking the linking of feminine quick-wittedness with the association of maritime phenomena, even sea holiness. The poet understands himself and his feelings in the slightly archaically comprehended sphere of Venus. This is not superficial shrewdness, but a phenomenon of unity with the whole live world. The author in basing herself on sensual feeling not on the reality of the real world and oscillates between despair and joy, the fear of lose and the delight of living sensation right up to death.

I place on the border of the lips  
Of the funeral  
Coloured paper  
White doves  
Broken wings  
\* \* \*

I am dying from the insensibility of small kisses  
The warmth of these kisses escalates the spirit of dreams  
I celebrate  
The sacred sea  
\* \* \*

I am dying breathing out of yearning  
The breath of love  
I embrace the earth's bosom  
I feel the mud in the non-existent river  
I cleanse myself with drops of warm rain  
Madly I seek your lips  
To officially announce  
The ceremony  
Of my colourful funeral

Cairo, July 1995

The poem *Qaddis* (The Saint)<sup>9</sup> may surprise more than one reader. In Europe one does not think of men in such terms, besides which sensitivity is not totally associated, or understood, in relation to the purity of a saint. Through the sensitivity of desire there beats, however, the fear as to the durability of the fervour of passion.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

You are a saint  
And I, a woman, give into great passion  
You are a saint  
And your face is crowned with love  
You saw in the field  
Swarthy sheaves  
You are a saint  
And I, a woman, am a binder of desire  
I dreamt of your touch  
I feared that the heat  
Of the passion in your eyes  
Would die

Doha, Qatar, January 1994

The next poem entitled *Shawq al-wisada* (The Thorny Pillow)<sup>10</sup> is its own form of triptych, where the individual parts are closely linked forming a thematic and consistent whole. It talks of the yearning and restlessness of expectation. A woman, as if in reality, as if in a dream, sees a man, and the thorns are as if the symbols of expectation, the desire for something new, the bestowing of sense to life and the submersion within it. We see a vision or may be a taster of the vision of the Angel which is waiting in order to overcome all of life's suffering.

The pillow you sleep on  
Is a case of thorns  
The thorn wounding my cheek  
Has bloodied my afternoon nap  
\* \* \*

My eyes are open  
Like the lips of an empty cup  
On its edges are settled the remains of black coffee  
And I am taken by a strange sensation  
For I saw a man  
Who had forgotten to button his shirt  
\* \* \*

The thorny pillow  
Wounded my other cheek  
Instead of blood the smell of old perfumes that issued forth  
Revived my memory  
I dream about the angel of dreams  
Beating its celestial wings

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

Created far away and smashing the ceiling of the room  
Filled with suffering  
Grows from the body  
Of the pillow

Kuwait, April 1994

Another poem entitled *Hikaya min madina* (Story from the Town)<sup>11</sup> is a poetic note upon the moment, an account of its fulfilment and appears to be an ordinary description of the meeting of a woman and man. Ordinary, yet extraordinary in the delicacy of the lovers' feelings. There is no tragedy here, and life extends a friendly hand.

Man and woman  
Met  
On a crowded street  
At a bus stop  
In wide open doors  
They left behind them a long queue  
They met  
In the theatre auditorium  
Embracing at the table laid for supper  
The woman was radiant  
While the man made eyes  
The town fell silent  
The crowd dispersed  
The hawkers' voices dropped  
She swallowed loudly  
And the moon returned a kiss  
Delicately... friendly  
On the woman's forehead  
And the man left a trace of his reflection  
On the surface of the tarmacked street

Doha, Qatar, January 1994

*Kitabat majnuna* (Crazy Notes)<sup>12</sup> is a work creating the impression of the noting of a real experience, richly characterised by the delight and elation containing lush poetic ties and far-reaching, even historical relations. One can clearly see the subtle, though clearly sensual motif, seeking definitions of states in the beauty of nature and things.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

In your eyes there is reflected the magic  
Of former kingdoms  
The golden sands of the desert  
The wine of longing  
Which matured in the barrels  
The wine of longing, which made my head spin  
I yearn to touch you  
I fear  
That you will change into a date god  
That you will run between my fingers  
Like a river of wine  
And I'll be intoxicated by your sweetness

Doha, Qatar, January 1994,

In the short poem entitled *Falsafa* (Philosophy)<sup>15</sup> she somewhat perversely talks at length about philosophy, in a woman's, though unusually mature way. Philosophy capitulates before love despite the consciousness of the unreality of fulfilment.

Come and talk of our feelings  
We will tug at the embrace of the night  
The necklace of our kisses has been stolen  
Come we will cover ourselves in our passion  
Dawn will dispense us  
And the loud sigh of love  
Come I will love you for the thousandth time  
My dreams  
Are an unfulfilable reality

Doha, Qatar, January 1994

*Al-'asha' al-akhira* (The Last Supper)<sup>14</sup> is the next poem to deal with some difficult moment in the life experiences of man and woman. The mysterious declaration of a man's love is presented in symbolic language. 'Young virgins' being at the bottom of memory characterise the primordial world of love. The world, lasting in the memory of events, is keenly returned to. Something from the border of reality, fantasy and dreams. So also is the poetic, melancholic, beautifully painted end of the poem.

I love you  
He said three times

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.



And immersed himself to the depths of memory  
Where young virgins  
Crouched  
In dark corners  
\* \* \*

The basalméd flowers  
The yellow leaves  
Climb on the balcony  
\* \* \*

Which the drops of rain cleansed  
The remains of the candle flame  
Painted the picture  
Of their last supper.

Bahrain, June 1994

The work *Mu'adala* (Equal Rights)<sup>15</sup> is saturated with love. The reality of life is here not taken into consideration. A tree is here a beautiful symbol – the tree of wisdom, and possibly the tree that is the inspiration upon which the symbols of love are engraved. And as if with the motto *Amor vincit omnia* – love overcomes all – the poet leaves the past forgotten.

We were three  
We embraced the tree  
We carved in its bark  
A heart  
An arrow  
Our initials  
One of us  
Left from the frame of the picture  
We were left a twosome  
We embraced  
And forgot  
About the tree.

13<sup>th</sup> February 1996

We become acquainted with the rich personal world of the author's imagination inspired by the religious and cultural distinctness of Macedonia in the poem *I'atiraf* (Confirmation).<sup>16</sup> The mood is confessional and lofty. Despite the nostalgic introduction, the undertone is rather optimis-

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

tic. Everything can come to the aid of suffering, memory, the marriages of hearts when cited in the name of love, even if buried.

I acknowledge the names  
Of all the angels  
Hovering around  
My sanctuary  
Maintaining their nuptials  
On the gate of my heart  
They have lit candles  
Around the grave of my love  
I acknowledge  
Those saints  
With begging eyes  
On the one hand suffering  
Exerting an impression  
On the cheeks  
The breaking dawn  
Stretched over the surface  
Over the houses of Ochryt

Macedonia 1994

In the poem *As'ila saghira* (Little Questions)<sup>17</sup> there are asked questions full of yearning and love. Although the mood of the poem does not generate sadness it is, however, saturated with melancholy and a certain sense of impossibility, or equally unfulfillment. For what can be more cheerless than '*the caravan will not reach the oasis*'.

In what way  
If you do not find time  
To write on the plaits of the cloud  
Fiery words of love  
How will you send me pages  
Whose letters show sorrow  
Why  
Why will the seriously thirsty  
Caravan  
Not reach the oasis  
Will not bring the incense  
Will not seek shade under the tent top  
But dreams of the shade of the palm

Washington, November 1994

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

In the poem *Zuhur al-azqa* (The Side Street Flowers)<sup>18</sup> there blossom the immortal flowers of poetry, love and passion despite the sense of being lost within the stone desert of loneliness.

I sow my loneliness  
On the pavement  
Of the stony side streets  
And my memories of his eyes  
Raised to my hand  
His lips  
Left  
A forgotten song  
My troubled heart  
Crazy  
Hurries  
In the winding side streets  
On the walls of houses  
That are grey  
He draws the symbols  
Of his burning love  
\* \* \*  
The gypsy flower seller  
Loves my poetry  
She gives me a red flower  
My beloved's eyes  
Shine  
With the former longing  
Shinning  
Like two deserted stars  
The red flowers  
Creeping between the sides  
Of the stone side streets.

Brussels, May 1994

In the poem *Nisyan* (Oblivion)<sup>19</sup> a woman complains about her man who forgets about everything, even about the lifelong pledge of love symbolised by a blue stone. In desiring to maintain everything and to recall it the woman gives herself over to reminiscences. She recalls the terrace with the view of the sea and the rapturous state of experiencing great love.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.

It seems that you have forgotten  
The shapes of the town's minarets  
The name of your mother  
Date of birth  
The streets of one's youth  
The blue stone  
You have put aside child's clothes  
How could you forget  
The dreams of my town embroidered  
Like the skirt of a gypsy dancer  
I saw your eyes  
At the bottom of the cup of morning coffee  
I have not forgotten  
What the date looked like  
Bathed in rain  
Your eyes  
Stole their shine  
The sinful dream  
The head is heavy in a dreamy prison  
Leaning towards your shoulders  
I still remember  
The old song  
The terrace with the view of the sea  
The blue stone  
Burning candle  
Birth certificate  
Night of love.

Brussels, May 1994

The poem *Hakibat al-musqifira* (A Traveller's Bag)<sup>20</sup> is the author's impressions from a journey. This concerns not only an actual journey of the author's but travel in general. The heroine knows how to travel, and moreover possesses the gift of the creative existence in it. Yet she also does not hide a feeling of loneliness. She understands the imperfection of the life she discovers while travelling, in the world and in herself.

The great crowd of the town  
Swallows small bodies  
A woman travelling  
Possessing bags and a passport  
With a permanent stamp  
Ugly towns and others

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88.

Beautiful  
A helpless woman with a great wing  
New faces  
With blue confusion  
With which she washes the dissatisfaction  
Of the night

\* \* \*

She dreams of towns without soldiers  
Of an airport without barriers  
Of women without make-up  
And men without ties  
She dreams of a greater wing  
She flies...  
She is flying high  
In escape from the fall  
Into the bag of the travelling woman

The airport in Istanbul, October 1994

The poem *Imra' likulli al-fusul* (A Woman for All Seasons)<sup>21</sup> tells of a woman and her courageous love like from The Thousand and One Nights. It talks of a woman who yields to love fully, without fear, full of the joys of existence and fulfilment.

You are a woman for all seasons  
You get made-up  
You bravely  
Tell your mirror fairy tales  
About the woman who sailed the boat  
Of desire  
Planted the flower of love  
In the poetry of night  
Came without an appointment  
Showed her love in disarray  
She clasped her hands  
When her beloved appeared  
At dawn.

In the Plane from Kuwait to Paris, May 1994

The next richly metaphoric poem entitled *Wahaj untha* (Female Flame)<sup>22</sup> can be interpreted as a song about a great beautiful love, freedom and bewitchment.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

A woman was born from the flame  
Of the sun  
Her waist was surrounded by the shackles  
Of love  
A red rope  
From the sun's plaits  
The honey of her eyes gleams  
With a glowing  
Shine  
Like the light of a frightened star  
Escaping from the embraces of the sky

Shariqa, 1995

*Akhtam al-hujra* (The Suffering of Separation)<sup>25</sup> is equally a poem with elements of sensual, passionate love. Everything is so saturated with love – as the poem states that one's real lot is of no consequence. The future is also without significance, while the experiences of loneliness still do not darken the moment of elation.

All the seats  
Of the Sofa  
Stuffed cushions  
Make up the contents  
Of the Room  
\* \* \*

The cold bed  
Warmed bodies  
Meet  
So the Moon  
Is full  
\* \* \*

The warm woman touches the lucky card  
Searches for the face of the king  
The discarded sceptre  
In order to lie next to the body of another woman  
Full of love  
Rounded like the forbidden fruit  
Her soul has yet to experience suffering  
Loneliness

Kuwait, April 1994

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

The short poem *Mahzura* (The Forbidden)<sup>24</sup> is allegorical in character. In a veiled way it shows the blush of the innocent romantic frolics of lovers.

Night descends  
On the cheek of dawn  
It leaves a pert kiss  
The cheek reddens  
The other remains  
Embarrassed  
And awaits  
The forbidden  
Kiss

10<sup>th</sup> of February 1996

Thurayya Al-Baqami draws intensely not only on Arab cultural experience. In the work '*Ayd al-'ushshaq* (The Lovers' Feast)<sup>25</sup> she describes valentines, their mood and accompanying love, which *sows its peace among the cafes*. The poem is simple and very realistic in expression. It could have arisen anywhere geographically, for everywhere there are girls and red roses.

On Lovers' Day  
Valentines awoke  
Hearts blossomed  
School boys gave out  
Red flowers  
To spring maidens  
Their cheeks reddened  
With embarrassment  
Love sowed  
Its peace  
Among the street  
Cafes  
Love played out  
Its eternal symphony

Kuwait, February 1996

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

The short four-line poem entitled *Hikaya* (A Tale)<sup>26</sup> strikes one with its artistry of poetic contraction of methods. We observe economy of image and metaphor. The women lack beauty, while the men courage in utterance, children whereas have a threatened perspective for childhood. All of which is accompanied by an ominous heat wave. The poem appears as a valuable and apt characterisation of contemporary times. Times which neither suit by their nature the author, nor bear well for future generations.

Women without lashes  
Men without mouths  
Children have sold their childhood  
To the burnt sun with powder.

The poems included here show Thurayya Al-Baqsmi as someone freely moving within the poetic genre. She likes, and wants, to write about everything that she values, does not shun personal reflection and her own feelings. Her poetic output is richly endowed in subjects and feelings. She is bold in her assertions, and in the poetic trance she undertakes the subjects that surround her. She speaks poetically about ordinary life, for which there is no recipe.

Muhammad Bassam Sarmini thus characterised the works contained in the volume:

There texts move within ecstasy, love and subjectivism. The writer has liberated herself through her sensitivity from the imprisonment of all that is personal for the sake of all that is human. The poet uses well the art of irony, and particularly irony directed towards the world which looks at life with half an eye. Thurayya sharply criticises modern times full of falseness and consumption, where man himself kills the beauty of feeling. The author places the greatest emphasis upon woman, defends her doggedly with claws and fights for her freedom, she describes that beautiful female world.<sup>27</sup>

Another Arab critic Mahmud Mursi evaluates the volume as follows: *The texts are something more than a poetic display. They are images that transcend the customs and traditions of displays. They are free from the frames of place and the external light which as if find their specific presence. They are saturated with colour yet remain words.*<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>27</sup> Muhammad Bassam Sarmini, *op.cit.*

<sup>28</sup> Muhammad Mursi, 'Ufura fi at-tranzit, *Kullu Al-'Usra*, No 359, Sharjah, 30 Aug. 2000.



## Conclusion

Thurayya Al-Baqsami, having an artistic bent and education, easily and gracefully moves within varied cultural areas, within her literary creativity, yet does not flaunt overwhelming erudition. She does not advance easy solutions, nor does she attempt to moralise, she does not impose on one's cultural models. Her sensitive artistic personality allows her to perceive the true image of society and the surrounding world. It allows her to show what is transitory, beautiful, ugly or bad.

She wants to give the reader an idea. To bring about a situation whereby for at least a moment he thinks about himself, people, the country, the Fatherland. Thurayya's creativity is full to the brim with humanistic content and bound in universal beauty.

Thurayya gets to the reader through image. Her word has the ability to conjure forth images. She is understood everywhere because her writing and art possesses a character and dimension that is simple, human and eternal.

Thurayya Al-Baqsami's work can be summed up in the words of Olga Bergholc:

For a real writer, devoted with their whole heart to the life and struggle of the nation, there cannot exist any danger in the process of writing about oneself and one's own life. No, here there is not threat of him contemplating his own navel, he is not involved in the description of personal frivolity, but instead in telling of his own heart even about its secret tremors he unfailingly tells of the heart of the nation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Olga Bergholc, *Dzienne gwiazdy*, Warszawa 1966, pp. 42–44.



SIMPLIFIED transliteration of ARABIC NAMES AND TITLES, USED IN THE BOOK, AND ITS EQUIVALENT IN THE ENGLISH  
TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM

Thurayya Al-Baqsamī

***Al-'araq al-aswad***

Ya al-mashmūm

Umm Adam

'Arūs al-qamar

Al-mulabbas

Al-fazī'a

Al-mulla

Ad-dumya

***As-sidra***

As-sursur

Ad-dyfa'

Al-katf

Buq'at lawn

Al-hafafish

As-saf'a

***Shumu' as-saradib***

Zaman al-inhidār

Arjuha ar-rahil

'Ashiq al-jidār

At-tabur

Abwab mujannaha

Kawma shawq

Atash Abu Sakhir

Jamr az-zakira

***Rahil an-nawafiz***

Qalbuha al-ahdar

Rajul bila 'aynayn

Kanat hiya ash-shahid

Da'irat al-basatir

Suwar ma'akusa

Thuqub fi az-zakira

Al-'ajz al-abyad

'Amu Khalifa

Ashjar Ba'quba

Thurayy, Al-Baqṣamī

***Al-'araq al-aswad***

Yā al-mashmūm

Umm Adam

'Arūs al-qamar

Al-mulabbas

Al-fazī'a

Al-mullā

Ad-dumya

***As-sidra***

Aṣ-ṣurṣūr

Aḍ-ḍifda'

Al-Katf

Buq'at lawn

Al-khafāfīsh

Aṣ-ṣaf'a

***Shumū' as-sarādīb***

Zaman al-inḥidār

Arjūḥa ar-rahīl

'Āshiq al-jidār

Aṭ-ṭābūr

Abwāb mujannaḥa

Kawma shawq

'Atash Abū Ṣakhīr

Jamr adh-dhākira

***Raḥīl an-nawāfīdh***

Qalbuḥā al-akhḍar

Rajul bilā 'aynayn

Kānat hiya ash-shāhid

Dā'irat al-basāṭir

Ṣuwar ma'kūsa

Thuqūb fi adh-dhākira

Al-'ajz al-abyaḍ

'Amū Khalīfa

Ashjār Ba'qūba

***Muzakkirat Fattuma al-kuwaytiyya as-saghira***

***Fī kaffī ‘uṣfūra zarqā’***

Ji'tu lil'alam fi muzhara samita  
Imra 'ajiza bijinah kabir  
Qalb mumaddad 'ala mastabat  
Hina taju 'al-'asafir

Qarar imra`  
Lugha khassa  
'Awda  
Wilada  
Janaza mulawwana  
Qaddis  
Shawq al-wisada  
Hikaya min madina  
Kitabat majnuna  
Falsafa  
Al-'asha` al-akhira  
Mu'adala  
I'tiraf  
As'ila saghira  
Zuhur al-azqa  
Nisyan  
Hakibat musafira  
Imra` likulli al-fusul  
Wahaj untha  
Akhtam al-hujra  
Mahzura  
'Ayd al-'ushshaq  
Hikaya

***Al-marsam al-hurr wa rihla 25  
'aman***

Usrati  
An- Nahda  
Ar-Ra'id  
Al-'Arabi  
Al-Watan  
Al-Qabas  
Nuqush  
Nusus wa risha

***Mudhakkirāt Faṭṭūma al-kuwaytiyya aṣ-ṣaghīra***

***Fī kaffī ‘uṣfūra zarqā’***

Ji'tu lil'alām fi muḡhara ṣāmita  
Imrā` 'ājiza bijināh kabīr  
Qalb mumaddad 'alā maṣṭabat  
Ḥina taju` al-'aṣāfir

Qarār imrā`  
Lugha khaṣṣa  
'Awda  
Wilāda  
Janāza mulawwana  
Qaddīs  
Shawq al-wisāda  
Ḥikāya min madīna  
Kitābāt majnūna  
Falsafa  
Al-'aṣhā` al-akhīra  
Mu'ādala  
I'tirāf  
As'ila ṣaghīra  
Zuhūr al-azqa  
Nīsyān  
Ḥakībat musāfira  
Imrā` likulli al-fuṣūl  
Wahaj unthā  
Akhtām al-hujra  
Maḥḡūra  
'Ayd al-'ushshāq  
Ḥikāya

***Al-marsam al-ḡurr wa riḡla 25  
'āmān***

Usrati  
An-Naḡda  
Ar-Rā'id  
Al-'Arabī  
Al-Waṭan  
Al-Qabas  
Nuḡūsh  
Nuṣūṣ wa rīsha

Al-Kuwayt  
Kull Al-‘Usra

Muhammad Bassam Sarmini – Fi kaffi  
‘usfura zarqa’. Hat`at Thuraya Al-  
Baqsamī al-laziza  
Mahmud Mursi – ‘Uṣfura fī tranzit  
Muhammad Al-Qadiri  
Jubran Khalil Jubran

Al-Kuwayt  
Kull Al-‘Usra

Muḥammad Bāssām Sarmīnī – Fī kaffi  
‘uṣfūra zarqā’. Khaṭ`at Thurayya Al-  
Baqṣamī al-ladhīdha  
Maḥmūd Mursī – ‘Uṣfūra fī trānzīt  
Muḥammad Al-Qadīrī  
Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān

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*Transcending Traditions. Thurayya Al-Baqsami. A Creative Compilation – Poetry, Prose and Paint* is an attempt to systemise Thurayya Al-Baqsami's literary creativity as well as examining the significance of her artistic work.

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